

Encouraging Emotional Well-Being and Engagement in Students Through Respectful
Interactions

by

Laura Street
B.A., Carleton University, 1994
B.Ed., York University, 1996

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Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Tim Pelton (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Supervisor

Dr. James Nahachewsky (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)
Department member

In this project, current research is explored regarding the relationship between emotional well-being and student engagement. The literature review reveals how creating a positive classroom climate can lead to student engagement through relationship building, modeling interaction skills, subject integration of social skills, and encouraging family involvement. Entwined throughout these processes is the abiding issue of time. Change will only occur if a focus on the well-being of our students can be woven throughout a teacher's existing practices. Following the literature review, the author engages in a critical reflection of her own practice to develop pro-social classroom relationships throughout an instructional year including suggestions and strategies that can be used to teach about interacting with others under the umbrella of a curricular topic. The final portion of this project consists of an annotated list, created by the author, of picture books that are meant to initiate a dialogue with students regarding issues of social interaction, specifically: inclusion, initiating and maintaining friendships, fair play and cooperation, speaking, listening, and body language skills, and conflict resolution.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Let's Set the Scene

The following vignettes are fictional, but representative of what occurs in classrooms everyday.

It is October in my grade three classroom. I have just assigned partners for a fun new ten-minute math game. Eight of the pairs find a spot in the classroom and start playing. Two other pairs have partnered up but are now arguing over who goes first. I go over and after a few minutes they have started to play. A scan of the room shows me that I have a pair of students looking very angry at one another. After chatting with them, I discover that one of the participants is upset that he didn't get the marker colour of his choice. He has called his partner a few names and is refusing to play. We chat for a minute and they start to reluctantly play. Another pair has not moved from their desks; one of the students is crying, the other looks uncomfortable. My intervention reveals that the crier wanted to work with his best friend Blair, not "this new kid who I don't like". I work hard to get them started. I look at my watch and note that twenty minutes has passed. Of the pairs that initially got to work immediately, only two pairs are still engaged in the math. I am exhausted. "Worksheets tomorrow," I think to myself.

It is a cold January morning and my grade two class has been subjected to four days in a row of indoor recesses. Candice and Mark have both been playing peacefully with the marble tower every day. Jacob decides it looks like a fun recess activity and comes over to join them. He grabs the marble out of Candice's hand and takes a turn. She hits him on the side of the head. They both start crying.

It is February in my grade six classroom. The students come in after recess. Two girls trail in last. Crystal is in tears and the other, Sara, is seething. Their voices are escalating. There is name-calling. It is time for science but instead I have the class pull out books for quiet reading as I try to sort things out. As I talk with them, I come to the realization that Sara is angry because another student let Crystal cut in line. We talk it over and I send them back to their desks. I check the clock and realize twenty minutes has gone by. Our gym block is in ten minutes; science will have to wait until tomorrow.

It is a beautiful April morning. My grade five class is busy working on murals for an upcoming art show our school will be hosting. Brandon, Jacob, and Cody are working on a picture of Paris. Cody has just finished drawing the last piece of the mural, the Eiffel Tower. Brandon asks a question about Cody's picture that sounds more like a criticism. A big fight ensues which ends with Cody stomping on and tearing up their nearly completed artwork.

My Objective: Encouraging Emotional Well-Being in Students Through Respectful Interactions

Most educators would agree that creating a cohesive environment where students feel cared for and comfortable with one another is paramount for a successful year. September starts off with good intentions, devoting much of our first week to "getting to know you" activities and team building. We build a class charter of rights, speak briefly to the importance of showing respect to one another, and do a few activities around kindness. After this, we dive into our learning outcomes feeling that we have done our part to bond with our students and allowed them enough time to become acquainted with one another. Teaching time is limited, we justify to ourselves, and we need to focus more on academic learning outcomes.

The problem with this perpetual pattern is that a week of relationship building usually does not result in the creation of a classroom community. Often, weeks after our attempts at creating a peaceful environment, problems between students start to consume our time. We get frustrated and students become dissatisfied and unfocused.

In order to have content and engaged students, we need to attend more to their emotional well-being and teach appropriate ways to interact. Just as we would never expect children to be able to focus on learning if they have not had their physiological needs met (i.e., food, shelter), we should expect learning would be compromised if their social needs were ignored. Indeed, in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, social needs (love and belonging) precedes cognitive needs (McLeod, 2013). This means that a child who has an argument with a classmate tends to shut down and no further learning takes place until that issue is resolved. If a student is embarrassed or singled out in an uncomfortable manner, that child's focus is altered. How a child feels should come before academics.

Alfie Kohn (1996) states, "if you want academic excellence, you have to attend to how children feel about school and each other" (p.103). Current research continues to support Kohn's views that we need to start viewing emotional well being as an integral part of our students' academic success. Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011) write "fostering emotional skills in the elementary (primary) school classroom can lead to improved learning outcomes, more prosocial behaviour, and positive emotional development" (p.82).

I am the Norm

For purposes of understanding the teacher behind this project, envision the common, dedicated elementary school teacher. I am at the mid-point of my career. This year I am teaching grade four, however, I have taught all grades from kindergarten to seven. I work

hard, I involve myself in professional development, I run extra-curricular activities, and I continuously obsess about teaching strategies and ideas. I get excited when I find a new way of presenting a math concept on Pinterest. I search countless websites for the perfect art project. I spend way too much time afterschool speaking with colleagues about each of my students. I have developed decent classroom management skills over the years and generally children are happy in my care. I am professional and capable.

I am that teacher who tries to create a classroom with a calm and peaceful environment. I am that teacher who wants her students to work hard and be academically successful. I am that teacher who wants her students to treat each other with kindness and respect. I am also that teacher who often feels defeated in my attempts to attend to the social needs of my students by time and curriculum pressures.

Who am I? I am the norm.

Project Overview

In this project, what current research says about the relationship between emotional well-being and student engagement, will be explored. Steps we can begin to take, toward meeting our students' social needs, will then be shared.

The literature review will show how creating a positive classroom climate can lead to enhanced student engagement. The focus for doing so will be through relationship building, modeling positive interaction skills, direct subject integration of social skills, and encouraging family involvement.

Entwined in this topic is the abiding issue of time. I believe that change will only occur in my own teaching practice and that of others, if focusing on the well-being of our students can be woven into our existing practices.

Following the literature review is a discussion and sharing of activities, suggestions, and strategies that I used to teach mini-lessons about interacting with others under the umbrella of a curricular topic, for example, integrating social skills when forming groups for a science project, or, teaching children to speak respectfully to one another while playing a math game. As well, I have compiled a list of picture books that will help to open up dialogue with students regarding issues of social interaction. Read-alouds are a huge part of literacy programs and selecting books that focus on emotions, friendship skills, bullying, self-regulation, etc., is a realistic way for elementary school teachers to integrate these topics.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Although there are a variety of outcomes that deal with social and emotional learning, most teachers push them aside in order to focus on the vast amounts of easily evaluated math, language, science, and social studies outcomes. When completing report cards it is far simpler to hide the fact that we have not talked about strategies to connect with others, than admitting that we have not had the time to thoroughly teach multiplication facts.

The unfortunate reality is that students are entering school with deficits in their social competence and emotional well-being (EDI, 2013) and we have little choice but to spend more time addressing this short-coming. Doing so can no longer be limited to a few sporadic community building activities at the beginning of the year when we are likely more supportive and intent on establishing new relationships and routines with our students (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cameron, 2012). Encouraging social and emotional development must be a priority throughout the years of a child's education. Paying attention to the social needs of our students and teaching them to interact with one another leads to happy, more engaged students.

As a starting point, creating continuous opportunities for relationship building with our students should be at the forefront of our school day. Next, teaching positive interaction skills through modeling and thoughtful integration, woven into each area of study, is necessary. Finally, bridging the gap between school and home is a must if we are to fully encourage the emotional well-being and engagement of our students. There has always been considerable debate about whether social interactions should be taught at home or at school. Berry and O'Connor (2010) conjecture that "teachers have a unique opportunity to support children's social skill development because they interact with children in the important – and

often challenging – social context of the school” (p. 2). Whereas parents may have many opportunities to help their children learn social behaviour in the context of smaller groups such as with siblings, cousins, playdates, etc., they seldom have occasion to support their child directly in large peer groupings. Teachers, with this alternate perspective, can and should, take on a larger responsibility in this area.

Building Relationships

Teachers will probably agree with my position on an ideological basis, but will question how feasible it is to place such a strong focus on relationship building with the amount of curriculum there is to cover over a short period of time. While it is true that the emotional well-being of our students is not a major component of our learning outcome documents, historical, as well as current research and writings support the notion that curriculum does not have to be as stringent as Bobbitt’s (1918/2013) *Scientific Curriculum*. In fact, Eisner (1967/2013) suggested that sticking to a rigid set of measurable learning outcomes “can hamper as well as help the ends of instruction” (p.109).

Many curricular theorists would support the inclusion of relationship building as an important aspect of schooling. Dewey (1929) believed that “the social life of the child is the basis of concentration, or correlation, in all his training or growth” (p.36) and “that the best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others in a unity of work and thought” (p.35). Margonis (2011), an educational philosopher, “argues for pedagogies where teachers focus upon facilitating the development of strong relationships en route to creating exciting educational environments ” (p. 433). Noddings (2007/2013) claims that little time is spent on “the kinds of discussions that contribute to the education of whole persons” (p.400) and she suggests that two of our

aims should be to teach the “ability to communicate effectively” (p.401) and the “ability to work as a team member”. She urges that these are not outcomes that should be learned and memorized for the sake of a test and instead we should “ask how our selection of topics and teaching methods may contribute to the development of these attitudes and skills” (p.402). Deep-rooted in the philosophy of these and other educational philosophers is that learning should encompass a social component.

Relationship and community building research overwhelmingly points to its importance in creating well-adjusted learners. Sterrett (2012) asserts that “in our evolving world of education, one thing remains constant: our success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students” (p.72). McMahon, Wernsman, and Rose (2009) advocate that “fostering school pride and belonging and positive relationships among students and teachers may be cost-effective strategies to promote learning through building academic confidence” (p.277). They also suggest that students who experience a positive learning environment tend to report positive feelings about learning (p.277). It has been my experience that those students who feel good about and enjoy learning are often likely to pursue academic activities independently.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (2005) conducted qualitative research that involved observing 780 third grade classrooms, each for one day. Large amounts of data were collected in this rigorous study and it was found that “when classrooms were rated as showing a more positive climate (e.g., high global ratings of teacher sensitivity, positive emotional climate, etc.), children were also more likely to be engaged” (p.316). Ottmar, Rimm-Kaufman, Berry, & Larsen (2013) concluded with similar findings and wondered if learning and social relations

improved because “teachers in more social classrooms are more likely to facilitate the lesson, allowing students to guide the discussions and engage in more collaborative discourse” (p. 450). This suggests that letting some of the academic learning outcomes go or addressing them in such a way to allow for integration, in order to focus on relationships, not only creates happier students but promotes a better way of learning.

Similar findings, in terms of engagement, were made by Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011). They conducted a meta-analysis that supported their hypothesis that positive teacher-student relationships had positive associations with engagement and achievement. They found this to be the case, although the link was much stronger for engagement than achievement. What stood out in the findings was that older students seemed to benefit even more from positive teacher-student relationships. Many perceive the early primary years as the time when children require the gentle and caring teacher, however, these results suggest that the need persists throughout elementary school and is even more pronounced in secondary. Although older students may appear to be uninterested in school and their teachers, this finding infers that these connections are still important and necessary for engagement. Thus, the well-being of students of all ages is affected by the nature of the relationship that is built with their teacher, further supporting the need to focus more of our energies in this area.

Research does suggest that taking the time to develop relationships with our students will pay off with a more positive and efficient classroom environment and children better able to cope with social interactions. While investigating the value of teacher-student relationships, Berry and O’Connor (2010) surmise “positive interactions between teachers and children likely serve as important models of prosocial exchanges. Thus, high-quality

teacher-child relationships help to provide both the skill set, as well as the support for children to practice these newfound skills in the social context of the classroom” (p.3). Their findings showed that the relationships that we build with our students do correlate to more positive social behaviours in the classroom. Their results also showed that this benefit occurred throughout the elementary schooling years, particularly between grades three and five. If, as teachers, we pay attention to building connections with our students throughout the year, we may find ourselves dealing with fewer conduct issues. Additionally, our students may have more energy to expend on learning. Furthermore, their results suggest that negative relationships between teachers and students, particularly over a long period of time, can have detrimental effects on social behavior, even in students who were not at-risk for early behaviour problems. This suggests that building positive relationships with our students is not an option. If we want children to experience academic success they must remain engaged in their learning. Children whose social needs are not met and who experience repeated negative interactions with their peers and teachers are unlikely to remain engaged in their learning.

Building effective relationships with our students is a necessity but still must remain time-effective. Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, and Hanna (2010) suggest several strategies that develop relationships with students, in particular challenging students, in ways that do not require many extra minutes in the day. Although they focus primarily on the middle grades, their strategies transcend specific ages. They suggest the notion that getting to know and understanding the student is a key component to bridging the gap between teachers and learners. Key suggestions on how to do this include building empathy, valuing the abilities of our most difficult students, being in control of our own emotions, and being respectful of

multicultural differences. A teacher who acknowledges the struggles a child is having with an empathetic response validates the concern and encourages the relationship. A teacher, who expects students not to react to the teasing of others, must also not react in anger to negative comments made by students. Furthermore, being aware of one's biases regarding cultural differences, through the willingness to self-examine, can also pave the way for better student-teacher relationships. The authors offer that educating our students is more effective when we value and encourage enhanced personal interactions. The most salient modes of doing so are by managing our classes in a respectful and supportive way and to be willing to engage in personal introspection with deference to our own mind-sets.

Listening attentively to our students may be another way to build relationships and encourage positive interactions. Quinn, S., & Owen, S. (2014) examine the importance of authenticity when listening and they reaffirm that even our young primary students want to be heard. Although we may feel that we are authentic in our dealings with students, do our actions and words reflect this? How often do we try to deal with many student issues at once during our hectic days? Sadly, I can recount many incidents where I half-heartedly listened to a student's suggestion on something we could change or do differently. Although I try to take the time to deal with issues of concern to students in a caring and thorough manner, I will also admit to rushing students who are explaining something, in order to fit more into our day. The reality is that children pick up on this. They know that they have not been taken seriously and they are aware that our listening was not authentic. When teachers slow down and demonstrate effective listening skills our students feel heard and valued. When we take the concerns of our students seriously and make changes that reflect their ideas and thoughts, we are showing that they are an integral part of our classroom community. The outcome will

be engaged and happier children.

Teaching Respectful Interaction Skills Through Modeling

Pelco and Reed-Victor (2007) write about the importance of directly teaching social skills as “it is becoming clear that children who have difficulty regulating their emotions and behavior experience more conflict in relationships with parents, teachers, and peers and show lower academic achievement than do their more regulated peers” (p.37). Although their focus is on learning-related social skills such as self-regulation, teachers know from their own experiences that all aspects of social skills relate to a child’s ability to learn. As mentioned previously, however, time plays a major component in what teachers teach. We recognize our students’ need for learning emotional skills yet we question how we can effectively add anything more to our already highly scheduled time-constrained days. McEwan (2012), in her reflective essay, observes:

It is not surprising in today’s accomplishment-driven, Western culture that people are more obsessed with managing, saving, and efficiently using time than they are with questioning their beliefs about time! Nowhere is this obsession more noticeable than in schools where students and teachers alike earn praise for organizing their time and working efficiently. (p. 82)

This idea leads one to speculate on whether or not modeling and relying on teachable moments is a more realistic mode of supporting the emotional development of our students.

Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011) recognize that there are many programs designed to directly teach emotional skills, however, their research “lies in the assumption that some teachers are able to foster positive emotion learning opportunities implicitly, through the manner in which they deal with emotional issues, such as those between students, as well as

those between students and themselves” (p.85). Through interviews, many hours of classroom observations, and thorough data sorting, their goal was “to obtain illustrative examples of implicit emotion teaching by selecting teachers who, by reputation, were likely to use spontaneous learning opportunities, and, by observing in their classrooms, look for instances of teacher-initiated emotional interactions” (p.85). This clear and engaging study “illustrated that emotion-related behaviors are observable in academic environments, and can directly support prosocial and emotional development, without these learning opportunities being an explicit component of instruction” (p.96). Drawing similar conclusions, Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, & Wold (2009) provide insight that teacher support is important to the emotional well-being of students because teachers “may be regarded as potentially more powerful norm senders and models of behavior and may be expected to be the most salient providers of social support who influence students’ school satisfaction” (p. 305). They write, “by personalizing the school environment and making every individual student valuable and recognized as a highly esteemed person, teachers can create a culture for sensitive and responsive interaction among the people in the school environment” (p.305). Although this relates directly to relationship building, it also suggests that by valuing individual students, we are modeling the importance of esteem. When we appreciate the qualities of our students in a public manner we are demonstrating kindness, how to use praise and give compliments, how to show interest in what someone else is doing through questioning and listening, creating awareness that everyone has unique qualities, and that all individuals deserve respect. Furthering the necessity for modeling social interactions, Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman (2007) “suspect that children who are exposed to positive and responsive teachers are more likely to learn how to regulate their emotions and behaviors and develop skills in

social interactions through modeling and carefully crafted experiences that scaffold these children's social skills" (p. 83). They were able to conclude that "when teachers provide a proactively managed, positive classroom environment marked by teacher sensitivity, an allowance for student autonomy, and evaluative feedback, children's social behaviors can be shaped and developed" (pp. 94-95). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) also support the idea that the classroom environment can encourage positive interactions in children. They remark

Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students, designing lessons that build on student strengths and abilities, establishing and implementing behavioral guidelines in ways that promote intrinsic motivation, coaching students through conflict situations, encouraging cooperation among students, and acting as a role model for respectful and appropriate communication and exhibitions of prosocial behaviour. (p. 492)

Although this hypothesis may appear overwhelming, in actuality it is a boon to time-strapped teachers who want to support children with ways to interact positively. These researchers are not suggesting that we design complicated programs or units; they believe that the way we organize and run our classroom, and the way that we talk with our students and help them to communicate with one another, will lead to content and engaged students with fewer behaviour struggles.

Jennings and Greenlaw place value on creating a climate for learning and good classroom management skills. It is very difficult to model kind ways to communicate with one another when we are upset, frustrated, and on the verge of burnout. When little Ophelia has thrown her books across the room and swears at her teacher for the third time in a week,

it takes nothing short of a miracle to maintain the Jones (2000) mantra for successful classroom management “Calm is strength. Upset is weakness” (p.173). Children do hear us when we criticize or put-down other students for their poor behaviour choices and this leads to mixed messages on how to treat and talk appropriately to others. Moreover, “curriculum is anywhere learning occurs” and “is everything that the school does that leads to student learning—whether that learning is intended or not” (Stone, 2010, p.35). The impact of this is that “the unintended learning is often the most powerful” and “can convey more memorable lessons about the school’s attitudes than repeated lectures” (Stone, 2010, p.35). When our classes are managed effectively, which can be a huge challenge for teachers with the range of our diverse learners, positive interactions between teachers and students are more likely to occur. In fact, through poor management, we may be teaching our students that it is perfectly acceptable to treat others unkindly if we are provoked or frustrated.

Additionally, Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cameron (2012) discern that in order to function in school, children need to be able to draw on numerous social and self-regulation skills. Many children begin elementary school with an insufficient amount of strategies to do this. Whether we have time for it or not, it is in the best interest of both the child and the teacher to fill this gap. If we want our students to engage we need to seriously consider that “social and self-regulation skills that allow children to build friendships, manage their behaviors, and work well with others are needed, in part, to support learning in classroom settings” (Merritt et al., 2012, p. 142). Their research examined how providing emotional support to students results in better adjusted, ready to learn children. They found that sensitive teachers, who were characterized as being warm and kind, offering gentle guidance and using respectful language, had classes where their students were more likely to

be able to control their own behaviour. They also determined that “teachers who model sensitive responses to aggression may set into motion appropriate classroom norms and peer behaviors. Specifically peers may learn how to help classmates who are feeling angry and upset and diffuse situations that would otherwise result in aggression” (p. 154). This is a salient speculation for teachers mindful of their limited academic time with students.

Although we may use up precious minutes, particularly earlier in the year as behaviour issues start to come to the surface, modeling a calm and respectful way of dealing with issues that arise could create a ripple effect that may save us time in the future.

Direct Subject Integration of Interaction Skills

There may be times when a more direct approach is needed to address a pressing classroom issue or to prevent issues that are likely to arise that may affect the emotional well-being of our students (i.e., partner/group working skills, dealing with bullying). Scott (2003) conducted qualitative action research that involved integrating emotional awareness with literacy. With her grade two students, Scott used children’s literature to get the children thinking about and discussing emotional issues that related to their own lives. She concluded that “stories and student writing are extremely valuable ways of having children perceive emotions by identifying feelings and using their understanding of emotions to create new ideas through conversations and writing. Appropriate stories for the students should include rich descriptions of the evolving emotions of the characters and their circumstances” (p. 6). This method of teaching emotional skills may be more effective, as well as, being a realistic approach to time constrained teachers due to the fact that it is both engaging and integrated into an already important part of the curriculum. Further supporting the inclusion of teaching emotional skills through language arts is Mack’s (2012) thought-provoking narrative where

she discusses how “emotional literacy has an important place in the English curriculum because emotions cannot be separated from reading, writing, and thinking critically with language” (p.18). She also talks about the importance of reflecting on the language that we use and suggests, “the most significant way that we teach about emotion is through our own actions in the classroom” (p.21).

In much the same way, the fine arts can be a springboard for the integration of social skills in the classroom. Brouillette (2010) conducted a study involving artists placed in the classroom with twelve elementary school teachers. Each classroom received fifteen hour-long visits from the artists whose specialty was in one of the four arts disciplines, drama, dance, visual arts, or music. Each teacher consented to presenting follow-up activities after the visit. Data was collected through extensive interviews with the teachers. The researcher discovered that although the artists did not make a point of focusing on prosocial behaviour, the teachers frequently recognized opportunities to integrate the learning of interpersonal skills. Those teachers that worked with artists who specialized in drama reported the strongest effect on the interpersonal skills of their students, however, the other three domains also provided many occasions to integrate the teaching of positive interaction skills. One example of prosocial learning through dance was the teaching of personal space. Children were asked to picture a personal bubble and then to move without allowing their bubble to come into contact with anyone else. This led students to an awareness of respecting the boundaries of others. The lesson, that personal space should not be crossed unless one is given an invitation, was illustrated with a partner dance. Further examples included using the arts to teach about teamwork, acting as respectful and responsive audience members, and developing camaraderie that could help to teach the value of learning about one another.

Likewise Pecaski McLennan (2008) discusses the benefits of using sociodrama to develop caring relationships in the classroom. Her research highlights ways that interpersonal issues can be tackled using drama. When teachers create a safe environment for drama to occur, students can act out challenging social issues leading them to discover many possible solutions and suitable ways of communicating.

Other areas of the curriculum also lend well to teaching positive interactions, physical education being a prime example. With the amount of physical proximity and opportunities to communicate, lessons in the gym are naturally conducive to social and emotional integration. Goudas and Magotsiou (2009) investigate if using a cooperative education approach in a physical education program leads to improved pro-social behaviour. They felt that simply having children working with a group was not enough to promote growth in this area, rather the aim of integrating specific cooperative skills had to be at the forefront of every physical education activity. Their results indicated “students who participated in the program, compared to those of a control group, increased their cooperative skills and empathy, and decreased their quick-temperedness and their tendency to disrupt” (p.362).

It is important that research and reflection continues to focus on the best ways of integrating positive interaction skills into the classroom. Research suggests that modeling and integrating skills into our daily lessons and activities can be just as effective, if not more so, than direct teaching. Taking this approach may lead to practices that include the teaching of social skills more regularly and encourage educators to reflect on how they are modeling interactions.

Encouraging Family Involvement

If we are to facilitate an environment that promotes and encourages the well-being of our students in order to increase engagement, it is particularly important that we recognize the role that families play in our school community. Schools can be unwelcoming institutions for parents whose own experience with education was not a positive one. Parents who struggled with academics may also avoid taking a role in their child's education fearing that they do not have adequate skills. It has been my experience that children whose families do not support the school are less likely to be as engaged, complete homework, or express positive feelings about the school. If we are attending to a student's well-being, involving parents is another aspect of building community and creating a positive environment for learning.

El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) studied the relationship between parental involvement throughout elementary school and its effects on the academic and social growth of children. Their findings suggest that parental involvement does impact the social development of children and that "increases in parents' involvement over time were related to concomitant increases in children's social skills and declines in problem behaviors" (p. 1002). The idea that developing warm relationships between parents and teachers can influence the social development of our students is one that is currently embraced by kindergarten teachers. Most early primary educators would agree that encouraging parental involvement often helps to ease the transition to school for many young students. Powell, Son, File, and San Juan (2010) provide data that shows the social skills of pre-kindergarten students benefit from having parents regularly in the classroom. Beyond kindergarten, we see a steep decline in the regular involvement of parents. In fact, by the intermediate grades,

parents in the classroom are a rarity. If we are to find ways to encourage emotional well-being in our students, perhaps increased parental involvement throughout the elementary years should be considered. It may be as simple as making a point to have regular and positive conversations with our students' family members in the hallway at the end of each day, exposing children to a respectful interaction, as well as, developing their understanding that there is ongoing communication between home and school. Encouraging parents to be more regular volunteers furthers the opportunities to share about a child's abilities to interact with others in a positive manner thus fostering pro-social behaviour.

How to encourage more parental support can be a challenge, however. McKenna and Millen (2013) used a grounded study model to look at a sample group of parents in order to understand parent engagement. They used this data to create a model of parent engagement that "is a combination of parent voice and parent presence, whereby children's well-being is central to the interactions" (p.9). This study involved intense focus groups that encouraged discussion. As well, parents were asked to write letters to teachers about "their family, themselves, and their children as they saw these groups related to education" (p.16). Their model which highlights that "parent presence and parent voice lead to a holistic vision of parent engagement" (p.37) encourages "the development of cooperative, sensitive cadres of adults whose central goal is to work in conjunction with one another for the benefit of the child" (p.44).

Likewise, Hall et al. (2005) present two action research studies that also looked at ways to encourage parents to be involved in their children's school life and academics through a project called Learning to Learn. This research involved educating parents about

what their children were learning and how to help their children become better learners. Parents from these projects “reported an increased understanding of the processes in schools” (p.190). These projects aimed “to make explicit the processes that underpin learning and teaching, so that teachers, students and their families can work together to promote more successful lifelong learning” (p.190).

O’Connor (2010) found that the quality of teacher-student relationships typically decrease as children progress through the elementary years. As it is important to maintain these relationships throughout the child’s schooling it is necessary that we put effort into the prevention of this deterioration. O’Connor stresses that “the school and family environments do not exist in isolation from one another” (p.189) and her research indicates that children of parents who are more connected to the school and have positive interactions with the teachers are far more likely to have better relationships with their teachers. In fact, it was shown that the amount of contact between the parent and the teacher played a role as “children whose parents had greater contact with the school evidenced less rapid rates of decline in relationship quality” (p. 209).

Elbertson, Brackett, and Weissberg (2009) agree with the importance of parent involvement and they assert “it has become more apparent that children who engage in positive social interactions with their teachers, peers, and families and who participate actively and cooperatively in the learning process are more successful in and out of school” (p. 1018). They discuss the trend of families becoming less involved as they reach the upper elementary grades and stress the need to change this as research consistently demonstrates that involvement can benefit the child in many areas. Finding ways to include parents in the school community is a huge challenge for teachers and administrators. With relatively few

stay-at-home parents, finding time to participate in school activities is not a reality for most families. The authors proclaim that social and emotional learning in our classrooms “should include efforts to foster the development of school-family partnerships to support and extend classroom learning and positive impact on students” (p. 1026) and in order to do this, many schools are attempting more current methods of meeting this need. This is where frequent communication through e-portfolios, blogs, etc. may help to make connections with busy parents. Although we might not always have the ability to interact face-to-face with our parent community, giving our students the chance to share the on goings of their school day with family members via alternate means of communication, may encourage a connection between the child, parent, and teacher. This has the potential to positively affect the emotional well-being of our students.

Looking at new ways of encouraging relationship building with parents may help to foster the emotional well-being of our students thus leading to increased engagement.

Conclusion

According to Mack (2012) on teaching, “one of the most difficult parts of the job is finding a way for all the persons who show up in our classroom to respect one another and work productively. Harmony is more than a set of rules for behavior posted on the board” (p.23). Relationship building, teaching and modeling emotional skills, and bridging the gap with parents are necessary for creating an environment that promotes student well-being, and therefore, harmony. We must start paying more attention to how our students feel about school in order to increase academic engagement. It is my belief, however, that with the limited time we have with our students we must find ways to weave relationship building and

teaching emotional skills into our existing curriculum if we are to be successful. Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011) support this with research that shows “there are many naturalistic learning opportunities whereby emotions are shaped and managed and modeled in a positive manner by these emotionally skilled teachers” (p.96). McEwan’s (2012) comment that “perhaps it is the wise teacher who can be cognizant of time’s passing without being held captive by it and who is mindful of time’s significance, yet unafraid to seize its fleeting moments” (p.88) captures the essence of using teaching time effectively. Students may be best served if teachers approach the development of a positive classroom environment by not feeling that it is an extra but rather something that can and should be entwined in all that we do.

Chapter Three: Changing Practices

Introduction

Encouraging social and emotional development must be a priority throughout the years of a child's education. Paying attention to the social needs of our students and teaching them to interact with one another leads to happy, more engaged students. Accomplishing this, however, can be challenging due to the pressures of covering academic outcomes in a short period of time. It is my belief that it can only be done successfully through relationship building, modeling positive interaction skills, direct subject integration of social skills, and encouraging family involvement.

The focus of chapter three is finding ways to accomplish the teaching of positive interaction skills by integrating with academic subjects. In order to achieve this, I will be reflecting on experiences in my practice. This reflection becomes praxis because it also integrates perspectives from the literature I researched in chapter two. This combination of critical reflection then informs a list of recommended picture books that I have compiled.

In this chapter I will reflect on what I want my students to learn with respect to social skills, the importance of integrating respectful interaction skills into subject areas, and how I started to plan for the integration of these competencies this year. I then discuss ways that I incorporated the teaching of skills associated with inclusion, initiating and maintaining friendships, fair play and cooperation, speaking, listening, and body language skills, and conflict resolution. Following this, I discuss the evolving picture book list that I have created that can help teach social skills to children. I will highlight my criteria for choosing the books and will reflect on the effects of using this prosocial literature in the classroom. I will present this through a pastiche using events related to typical students.

Changing My Practice: Being Cognizant of Teaching of Respectful Interactions

As evidenced in my review of the literature, taking advantage of opportunities to both integrate and model proper approaches are probably the most effective and time efficient modes of teaching social skills to our students. As shown in the research by Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011), educators can address and teach appropriate pro-social behaviour by fostering a supportive classroom environment. These skills do not require an explicit program but rather can be approached through “spontaneous learning opportunities” (p. 85). Often we teachers regard conflict in the classroom as negative but it may be to the betterment of our students to consider it an opportunity for learning. When contemplating the importance of modeling, Stone’s (2010) thoughts on the unintended learning that happens in our schools bear repeating: “curriculum is anywhere learning occurs” and “is everything that the school does that leads to student learning – whether that learning is intended or not” (p.35).

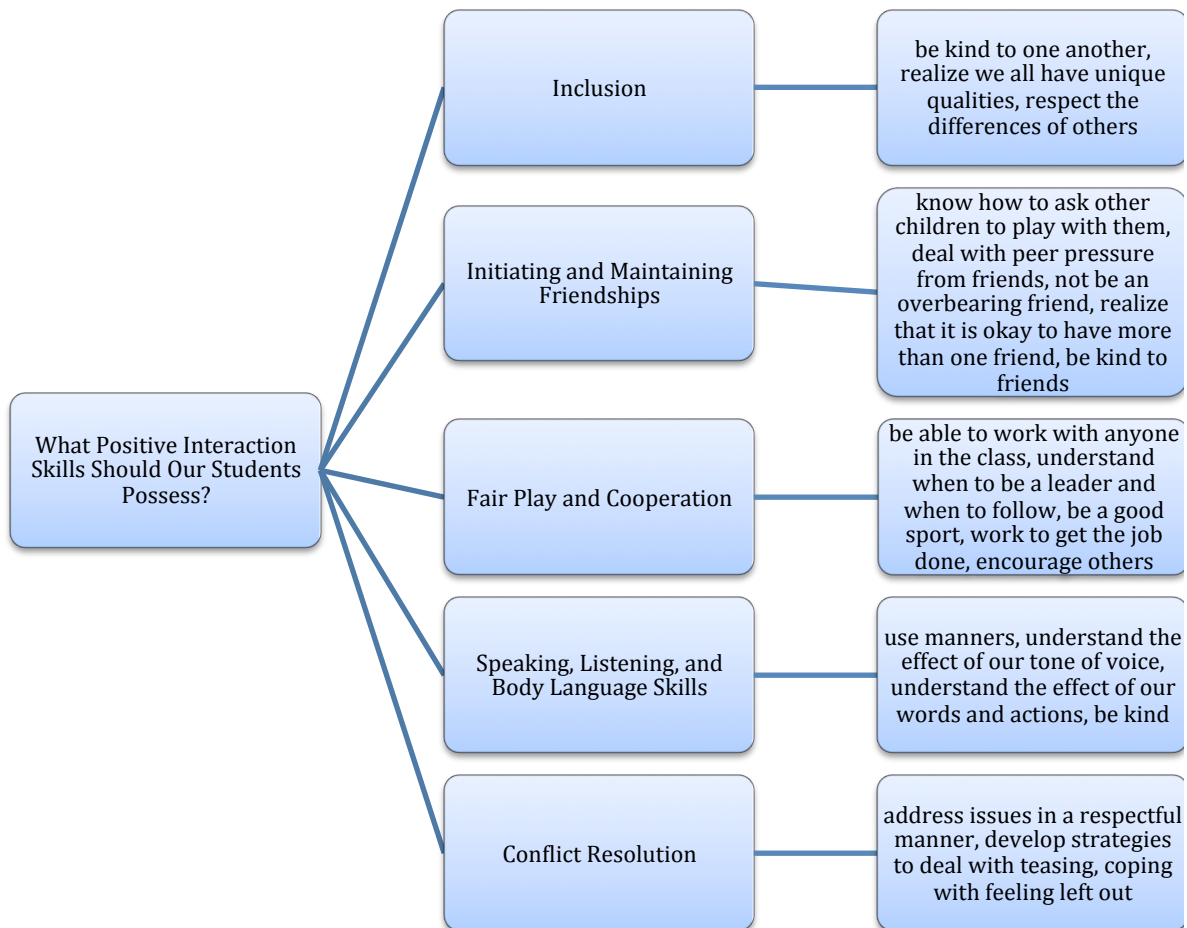
For the purpose of this M Ed project and to further promote learning how to interact with one another in a positive manner in my classroom, I have set out purposefully in my teaching this year to be mindful of all opportunities that can be effectively and seamlessly integrated into various subject areas. I also have become more aware of how I model for my students. Therefore, I have spent time reflecting on the way I talked to other teachers, educational assistants, and students from other classes, when in the presence of my students. As well, I have carefully examined the manner in which I spoke to and treated the students in my own classroom. Below, I present reflections on my own teaching experiences within a fictional narrative of typical classroom and school contexts during an instructional year. I further integrate references to the literature to ground these reflections within the broader educational discourse of supportive classroom environments. Through this critically

informed reflection on my own practice, as praxis, I intend for educators to become mindful of their words, actions, and pedagogical choices towards a classroom environment that is respectful of all learners.

What I Want my Students to Learn

How do I want my students to treat me? How do I want my students to interact with one another? How should my students interact with other adults in the school? How do I expect my students to handle their own emotions so that the learning of others is not negatively impacted? I started my thinking along these lines by brainstorming the various social skills that I felt students should develop.

The following chart outlines the results of such thinking, keeping in mind that needs that will arise throughout the year will obviously take precedence over constructed lists that I create beforehand. Having this list as a starting point, however, encourages one to be more aware of the common needs of students that most likely will surface during the course of a year.



Integrating Respectful Interaction Skills Into Subject Areas

Reflecting on the integration of respectful interaction skills into subject areas brings to mind Jennings and Greenberg's (2009). They emphasize the importance of setting the tone in the classroom, guiding students through conflict, providing opportunities for cooperation, and encouraging appropriate behaviour through creating a climate for learning and good classroom management skills (2009). This is a proactive approach on how to effectively support the emotional well-being of our students. One of my own strengths as a classroom teacher is in creating a comfortable environment for learning. The notion of classroom

atmosphere is always at the forefront when I prepare for a new school year. I ensure that I have created a learning environment that is rich with routines, predictability, and a sense of calm. This does not mean a classroom that is inflexible or devoid of excitement. It does mean that kids clearly know what the expectations are, and they feel accepted and supported in their learning space. It has been my experience that when children come to school and they do not feel this way, they will not take risks with their learning, they will not communicate positively with their teacher and their classmates, and they will not be as engaged. Therefore, ensuring students are comfortable in the classroom has always been a priority for me.

Unfortunately, beyond this, I find myself struggling to make time to adequately deal with situations of conflict that repeatedly surface throughout the year, as well as, teaching positive interaction skills effectively. This goes beyond classroom management. This is purposeful teaching of prosocial behaviour. Furthermore, as my research of the literature demonstrates, this will likely only become successful when it is integrated into all that we do in a school day.

Planning for the integration of positive interaction skills. To change one's practice, one must become intentional. Although it is important to look for teachable moments and to be willing to spontaneously incorporate these occurrences into our lessons, our best teaching generally comes from a well thought out lesson plan.

My first step then, towards incorporating the consistent teaching of social skills, was to simply start by writing a social learning outcome in my lesson plan book, next to each academic learning outcome. These ranged from basic (i.e., saying thank you when the teacher hands you a paper) to more complex interaction skills (i.e., ensuring that all group

members play an active role in a shared assignment). Teachers intrinsically know how we want our students to behave, as is evidenced in countless staffroom complaint sessions, and we do attempt to remind students when these behaviour expectations are not met. By incorporating mini lessons into all that we do, a shift occurs. Our teaching moves from a reactive response to a situation to a more enterprising approach. This ultimately sets our students up for success resulting in more positive relationships, learned social skills, and as research by McMahon, Wernsman, and Rose (2009) suggests, this is also a simple method of fostering academic engagement.

The following section provides some examples of the ways that I incorporated the teaching of positive interaction skills this past year. These included:

Inclusion. In an attempt to promote inclusion in my classroom this year, one of the first things that I wanted to tackle were the issues associated with working with a partner or small group. In the past, playing math games, working on group projects, dividing the class into teams for gym games, and even doing a “turn and talk” with a classmate often resulted in tears, and hurt feelings. This is because as I have mentioned earlier, some children do not work well together; there are kids that everyone wants to work with; and there are those individuals that no one seems to want to work with. I set out to change these circumstances with the belief that children can be taught that they should be able to work with anyone in the classroom, even if they prefer not to socialize with some students regularly.

I started to incorporate a daily partner work time into my math lessons. This was usually a math game that reviewed skills we were working on. I chose games that could easily be adapted to the learning needs of each student, thereby allowing endless combinations of partners in the classroom. I used a variety of strategies to randomly assign

partners each day (matching cards, pictures, etc.). Before we played our first game, we developed criteria together on how we felt we should treat a partner to make them feel comfortable. The students came up with a variety of suggestions (i.e., smile at your partner, thank them for being your partner, make sure you are doing your fair share, etc.). We posted these guidelines and briefly referred to them before playing our daily math game.

I noticed the positive results immediately. I had far fewer upset students and when issues did arise, they were easily settled through revisiting our criteria. Engagement and focused work time increased dramatically.

Several months into the year, students wanted the opportunity to choose their own partners from time to time. We developed criteria for this as well, which included ensuring that no one felt left out, saying yes to the first person that asks you, and how to gently turn someone down if you already have a partner. Once again, developing these guidelines saved us endless time and promoted a positive atmosphere during math.

Teaching inclusive practices can be challenging when there are children who are very difficult to work with. At times this year, I have found it necessary to have a private conversation prior to the activity, with children paired up with a particularly challenging student. Sometimes simply acknowledging the challenges the pair will face is enough. Other students need strategies and support to work with certain students. The bottom line though is that this challenging aspect of partner work needs to be met head-on as each student must be valued. As is previously evidenced in the research of Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, and Wold (2009), this creates a culture for positive interactions.

Another way I integrated inclusion into the classroom was through frequently pointing out the unique strengths of my students and other adults in the school. My intention

was to help my students to understand that our differences are valuable to the community as a whole. Too often we feel that we have to be good at everything and when we fall short in an area that someone else is strong in, feelings of jealousy surface. Appreciating the strengths of others allows us to start accepting differences. I had many guest speakers this year and I explained to the children that I invited this person in because it was an area I am not strong in and I want them to learn from an expert in the field. As well, many of my students have things they are passionate about (i.e., knowledge about WW2 history, basketball, sailing, music, multiplication tricks) and I have made a point to acknowledge and use these strengths this year. This was a simple, time effective way to continuously support inclusion and it built relationships with and between my students. As shown in the research of Barry and O'Connor (2010), this type of exchange is a powerful way to teach pro-social skills.

Initiating and maintaining friendships. It is important students know how to ask other children to play with them, deal with peer pressure from friends, not be an overbearing friend, realize that it is okay to have more than one friend, and be kind to friends. Navigating the world of friendship can be extremely challenging for children. All ages are vulnerable to the emotional ups and downs that accompany building relationships with others. Attempting to tackle initiating and maintaining friendships can be a complex and time consuming endeavor for teachers. Integrating these skills and modeling relationships are the only viable options. Language arts is the subject where I began to integrate these skills as there is a vast amount of children's literature on friendship. As will be discussed later in this chapter, picture books provide teachers with a fantastic mode of combining friendship skills with academic curricular outcomes. Many books we read in our class act as a springboard for

simple skills that allow us to reach out to others. These books give us the opportunity to discuss how characters handled friendship issues. This has led the class to examine common dilemmas as stories at an arms-length manner, and develop skills together that can be applied to real life situations.

Writing assignments were easily integrated with the skills associated with developing friendships. In one particular writing task, the students looked at what would make us feel good at recess. These were shared with classmates and a list of what to do when we have no one to play with was developed. This criterion was referred to throughout the year. Poetry and journal entries were written to express feelings related to relationships with others and this too provided a gateway to examine how to build strong friendships.

As was suggested further by Pecaski McLennan (2008), drama can be an effective venue for practicing social skills. My class has also created skits that illustrated how it felt to be left out and how simple acts can have significant changes on the emotions of another.

In the following section I discuss examples of ‘fair play and cooperation’; being able to work with anyone in the class, understand when to be a leader and when to follow, be a good sport, work to get the job done, and encourage others.

Fair play and cooperation. Providing students with opportunities to interact is necessary if we wish to facilitate social and emotional growth in our students. They will not learn to play fairly or how to cooperate if they are not given time to practice these skills. Thus, this year I made a point of using instructional strategies that encouraged interaction whenever possible. Kagan’s (1992) *Cooperative Learning* provides many useful structures such as think-pair-shares, jigsaw, inside-outside circle, and carousel. Bennett and Rolheiser’s (2001) *Beyond Monet* also suggests a variety of strategies that get children talking with one

another and developing skills of cooperation such as walk about, numbered heads, and three-step interviews. Each of these strategies can be used in conjunction with academic outcomes such as editing stories, reviewing science material, discussing literature, and learning new material in social studies. Problems emerged and children struggled at times. Instead of dreading these moments, however, I have come to view them as opportunities for learning. These occurrences give way to integrated lessons about turn taking, sharing the workload, encouragement, and speaking kindly to others.

Physical education can also lend itself to integrating the teaching of social skills. There are many games and activities that can be tailored to foster cooperation and still teach movement and other skills necessary for sport. The gym is the perfect location for teaching students to accept winning and losing with dignity and respect for others. Recalling the research of Goudas and Magotsiou (2009), specific cooperative skills can and should be at the forefront of every gym activity to support prosocial behaviour. Center activities, free play, and recess also became prime opportunities to teach and reinforce fair play. Getting all staff onboard with using available opportunities to teach social skills is paramount to successful integration.

Speaking, listening, and body language skills. Prosocial skills here include use of manners; understanding the effect of our tone of voice; understanding the effect of our words and actions; and being kind. As I started to integrate teaching appropriate speaking, listening, and body language skills to facilitate the development of positive interaction skills, it again became apparent that providing opportunities for students to work and communicate with one another is necessary. Yan, Evans, and Harvey (2011) write of the importance of using natural learning opportunities to model and teach how to manage emotions. There is no better time

than when children are talking and working together. These normal exchanges give us the opportunity to address manners, tone of voice, and the effects of what we say, using an inherent approach.

The Power of Our Words (Denton, 2007) has helped to guide my own shift in teaching. Denton's book argues that how a teacher speaks and acts with their students, greatly impacts how those students feel, behave, and learn. Wilson, Pianta, and Stuhlman's (2007) research supports this. They found that children who were taught by positive and responsive individuals were more likely to develop stronger social skills and regulate their emotions. Denton (2007) provides a variety of suggestions and examples on how to effectively listen to our students, how to remind students to follow instructions, and how to redirect students. I have attempted to use her strategies when interacting with students in order to develop their own speaking and listening skills through modeling. I have also attempted to encourage manners and etiquette whenever possible, whether it was while handing out materials, listening to a presentation, thanking a speaker, or standing in line. Modeling and including these skills as a part of our daily classroom experiences was far more effective than giving a direct lesson.

Conflict resolution. It is important to learn how to address issues in a respectful manner, to develop strategies to deal with teasing, and to learn how to cope with feeling left out. While focusing on the previous four areas serves to minimize conflict, issues will inevitably still arise. Modeling effective strategies to deal with conflict was something that I focused on this year. I asked myself frequently if I was speaking to and treating my students in a manner that I would expect them to treat each other. I monitored my own tone of voice to ensure that it was respectful at all times.

Self-regulation came into play at this point and reminding students to use strategies that keep them in control of their own emotions became important. As well, choosing books that presented characters struggling with various conflicts encouraged conversation. Writing activities that coaxed students to look at different perspectives also gave way to learning how to deal with teasing, feeling hurt, etc.

Children need to work together and be exposed to conflict if they are to be expected to deal with it. If we do not give them the chance to encounter difficulties, we prevent them from learning valuable social skills. In the following major section of this chapter, I discuss how I undertook the main aspect of my M Ed project – developing a resource of recommended children’s literature to support prosocial behaviour that may be integrated into classroom instruction. In particular, I discuss: how I created the picture book list; my criteria for choosing the books; and some typical effects of using prosocial literature in the classroom.

Creating a Picture Book List

In an attempt to find practical ways to implement the teaching of respectful interactions and as part of my M Ed project, this past year, I decided to create a list of picture books that address a variety of social needs that our students encounter regularly and to make bins of these books readily available to my colleagues. You will recall that Mack (2012) discusses the connectedness of language arts and emotional literacy suggesting that it is the ideal area of study to integrate social skills. I chose picture books rather than novels feeling that this would allow for a wider range of interaction skills to be met. The difficulty with this is that it can be more challenging to find picture books that are thought provoking or entertaining for intermediate-level (Grades 4-6) students. Thus, the majority of the books on

my lists are geared more toward primary and early intermediate students. As new literature becomes available that better meets the needs of upper intermediate students, I will add it to my lists.

To begin the process of creating book lists, I returned to the skills that I wanted my students to have. These themes encompass a variety of social skills and were adaptable to the specific needs of the students that I was teaching. The books that I chose connect to my own teaching experience and practice and were sorted under the following headings:

-Inclusion

-Initiating and Maintaining Friendships

-Fair Play and Cooperation

-Speaking, Listening, and Body Language Skills

-Conflict Resolution

Selecting appropriate books was the most labour intensive part of this project. Although I love children's literature and have read a wide variety of books over the years with my students, I did not feel that I possessed enough knowledge about the books available that would fit my themes. My goal was to create booklists that mainly use good literature, rather than instruction-type manuals, so that these skills could be integrated into our language arts programs. As mentioned in my literature review, Scott (2003) also highlights the importance of choosing children's literature that is abundant with detailed emotional interactions. Finding a balance of both can be challenging therefore an expert was definitely required at this stage. I contacted my district librarian with the themes that I had chosen. She arranged for me to have a half-day release time to work on this project with the intention of making these lists available to other teachers in our district.

While at the Learning Resource Centre with the district librarian, I read through many books and began to classify them under my categories if they were relevant. I was introduced by the librarian to a variety of websites that I could follow in order to update my booklists as time goes on such as *Books That Heal Kids* (<http://booksthathealkids.blogspot.ca/>), and *Title Wave* (<https://www.titlewave.com/login/>), which allow a more refined search of current literature. The district librarian also offered to keep the list of my categories in front of her as she reads reviewing journals and to jot down any titles that she feels will fit my themes. As well, when new books come in for our various schools, she is the first to read them. She offered to let me know if any of these new titles will also fit. I also had the opportunity to discuss my intentions with one of our district curriculum support teachers who introduced me to several books that he had collected that were listed on a website called *Heart-Mind* ([www.http://heartmindonline.org/](http://heartmindonline.org/)).

Choosing the books. The main theme of my project is the integration of teaching social skills within the academic subject areas, thus, my initial feeling was that the books I chose needed to be quality pieces of literature. This will bring to mind McEwan (2012) discussing how teachers are constantly battling with time constraints and the importance of being mindful of how we use our time. Teachers might not teach social skills if it is viewed as an additional component of our day. I therefore wanted to select books that not only taught effective strategies for positive interactions, but also addressed the literary elements and appreciation of good literature as outlined in our learning outcomes. This seemed to somewhat contradict, however, with Scott's (2003) theory that emotional events should be clearly described in the story. When a story is too instructive, it tends to not be a good example of worthwhile literature. I accordingly decided that some didactic picture books

might have their place on my recommended list depending on the needs of the students being taught. For example, I have included a very simple picture book titled *Emma's Friendwich* (Murphy, 2010). Although not an example of rich writing, it is a simple story that early primary students will relate to. It gives clear examples of strategies that children can use to make new friends. Teachers can still integrate language arts learning outcomes with a more prescriptive book by referring to elements of plot, setting, or characters. Occasionally, books like this are preferred over a piece of quality literature if immediate skills need to be taught. The better literature can then be used in a recursive manner to further facilitate thinking and discussion on the topic.

At times, both reading process and prosocial skills meld seamlessly. When reading to older children, they can be taught to look for the author's intent or purpose for writing, based on what is clearly stated. They can also learn to infer. This is a major component of being an effective reader and it is a way of delving into the complexity of social and emotional challenges with children. Children often fail to realize how their words and actions can be more hurtful to others than physical altercations. A book such as *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012) explores inclusion in a powerful way. My class of intermediate students listened intently to the story of a new girl in school who was completely left out, even after she made multiple positive attempts to make friends. The book's thought-provoking sad ending incited good discussion about the author's message, as well as, how it relates to our own possible actions. Another example is *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig, 2013); an interesting story that can lead to meaningful discussions about feeling left out, and it can also be a good springboard for language arts lessons.

Creating the list. My criteria for books that made the list was as follows:

- The book had to have the potential for teaching elements of language arts. Quality literature was a major component, however, simpler, prescriptive stories were included if I felt that the social skill lesson would be useful and some integration of language arts skills could be included.
- I had to feel a connection to the book. Teaching is a very personal profession. There are many websites that review books and I talked with colleagues who recommended their favourite books. I did not include any book that I did not have the opportunity to read myself. Often times I found myself wondering why someone would include a book that fell under a certain category. Teachers constantly adapt lessons to suit their own style; this is no different from choosing books to read to our students. My final, compiled list can be a good starting point for a teacher looking to use literature in their classroom to integrate the teaching of positive interaction skills, however, they will likely only select the books that work with their teaching style or preference to a certain type of literature, and the particular needs of the students in their classroom.
- The books had to be of picture book length. There are many amazing novels that explore complex social issues. In fact, it would be far easier to find appropriate novels rather than picture books for upper intermediate students. Although I would highly recommend using these books in the classroom, in order to teach to a range of social needs that will arise over the course of a school year, picture books are more versatile. That being said, although the book industry seems endless in its supply of fantastic picture books, it does appear that there could be a market for upper intermediate literature.

- The books that I selected should be predominately current. Our job is to engage students and that means choosing teaching methods and materials from their era. Overwhelmingly, I wanted books that were from 2000 and beyond. This was not an inflexible rule and I did include some classics. There is a lot to be said for reading old favourites with children but there is also an abundance of incredible new literature that approach social issues in a more current manner.
- The list is just a starting point and should continuously evolve. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to explore the literature that already exists. As mentioned previously, new books are regularly being published. Keeping current with the new literature and adding to my book list will allow me to adapt to the various needs that are presented in my classroom in the coming years.

Effects of pro-social literature in my classroom. In this section I discuss what typically can happen when pro-social literature is introduced into the classroom. In my case, I am currently teaching at the grade four level. Such experiences, along with the research literature, influenced me as I developed my book lists. In this example of my own practice, I am referring to a typical language arts classroom with the class focusing on story plot, explaining personal connections to text, distinguishing between facts and opinions in text, making inferences to describe characters' intentions and feelings, and examining the author's purpose and viewpoint. Learning about positive social interactions is easily woven into lessons targeting these grade four outcomes, using the chosen picture books. The students not only developed in their ability to examine and explain stories as specified in BC ELA K-7 IRP, but they also began to demonstrate their personal connections to the underlying social themes of the books.

Grade four is an interesting grade level to teach when doing a project as such, as there is an abundance of overlap from the primary and intermediate years. Many of the books that appeal to young children are still appropriate to the maturity level of these early intermediate students. Likewise, they are starting to be able to handle more complex themes. As well, because their independent reading is so much more developed than primary students, they have more knowledge to draw on when discussing what has been read. This allows them to compare several books on a common theme and provides for a richer discussion about the issue at hand. Such was the case when we read three stories together, *The Smallest Girl in the World* (Roberts, 2014), *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012), and *Bird Child* (Forler, 2009). All of these books dealt with the theme of a bystander witnessing unkind acts. The students enjoyed all three of these read alouds and had many observations and comments about what occurred in the stories. Although these books were read on different days, several of the students made immediate connections between the three without prompting. Other students required the guidance to do so but were able to further discuss the similarities after connections were made more obvious. Not only did this provide a springboard for a scholarly discussion about commonalities in story plots and characters but it also gave way to a reflective conversation about how difficult it is to take a stand in similar situations and how it feels to be the individual who is ostracized.

I chose the wordless picture book, *The Girl and the Bicycle* (Pett, 2014) to teach elements of narrative writing. This is a simple story about a girl who wants to buy a bike that she notices in a storefront. She starts doing a variety of odd jobs for her neighbour until she has earned enough money for the bicycle. She finally returns to the store, money in hand, only to discover the bike has already been sold. Although upset, she purchases a tricycle for

her little brother. When she returns home, her neighbour surprises her with the bike. The book is beautifully illustrated and its lack of words seems to make the story line more compelling. Consequently, it was useful for looking at how a plot line is developed and supporting details are added. This story has an altruistic theme, however, that was integrated into the language lesson. My students had many comments about the girl's selfless act and were questioning if they would be willing to do the same themselves. We also had discussions about the difference between how this girl reacted to her disappointment and how *Bombaloo* (Vail, 2002), *Crankenstein* (Berger, 2013), or *Melvin* (Gassman, 2012), other characters we have read about, might have responded.

Dog vs. Cat (Gall, 2014) and *Too Tall Houses* (Marino, 2012), both very entertaining read alouds, paved the way for persuasive writing and encouraged reflective thinking about compromising.

One Smile (McKinley, 2002), *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids* (McCloud, 2006), and *Because Amelia Smiled* (Stein, 2012), led to poster making and poetry writing about the little things that we do for others that have a goodwill domino effect. The students also speculated about the effects of our unkind actions or disappointments that are not handled well which led me to read the classic bad day book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1972).

It should also be noted that these frank discussions also result in relationship building between students and teacher and students with their peers. To recapitulate the assertions of McMahon, Wernsman, and Rose (2009), children who experience positive relationships with their teachers and classmates, become more confident learners. After reading a book about teasing, students shared their own stories of being teased. This led other students to make

kind remarks in support of each other. Following such exchanges, the students had a more peaceful and productive day.

Many other small incidents of relationship building between students have occurred as a result of reading these books. About a week after reading *My Mouth is a Volcano* (Cook, 2005), a book about interrupting, a student blurted out a comparison statement about students in another class. A second student, sitting at the back of my classroom, indignantly declared, “That is not nice!” This caused the first student, who didn’t intend on being hurtful to feel very uncomfortable. He quickly apologized and quietly mumbled, “It just popped out.” This could have ended right there with the first student left feeling embarrassed. Instead a third student jumped in and said, “It is like in the book; for a minute your mouth was like a volcano!” This compassionate connection to the book caused the first student to chuckle, breaking the tension and allowing the children to reflect on how we all say or do inappropriate things from time to time.

Integrating social behaviours with language arts outcomes using picture books was a successful undertaking. It required minimal additional teaching time and was easily paired with academic outcomes. Furthermore, the discussions and behaviour changes that resulted were far more compelling than presenting a standalone lesson on a social skill.

Conclusion

Teaching strategies for positive interaction can be accomplished through integrating skills into all areas of the school day. As this reflection has shown, it is important to know what your students need to learn, and to be mindful of ways to include these skills at every available opportunity. The areas that I focused on were inclusion, initiating and maintaining friendships, fair play and cooperation, speaking, listening, and body language skills, and

conflict resolution. My picture book list is a continually evolving resource that can provide a good starting point for teachers wishing to blend social skills with language arts.

Chapter four of this project will provide further reflection with my experiences and suggestions for teachers interested in engaging with this topic.

Chapter Four: Personal Reflection

Project Summary

Students are entering school with deficits in their social competence and emotional well-being (EDI, 2013) and teachers have little choice but to spend more time addressing this short-coming. Doing so can no longer be limited to a few sporadic community building activities at the beginning of the year when we are likely more supportive and intent on establishing new relationships and routines with our students (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cameron, 2012). Encouraging social and emotional development must be a priority throughout the years of a child's education. Paying attention to the social needs of our students and teaching them to interact with one another leads to happy, more engaged students.

In this project, I explored what current research says about the relationship between emotional well-being and student engagement. Following that, I shared steps that we as teachers can begin to take, toward meeting our students' social needs and picture book resources to support this development.

The literature review reveals how creating a positive classroom climate can lead to enhanced student engagement. The focus for doing so is through relationship building, modeling positive interaction skills, direct subject integration of social skills, and encouraging family involvement. Entwined in this topic is the abiding issue of time. I believe that change will only occur in my own teaching practice and that of others, if focusing on the well-being of our students can be woven into our existing practices.

Following the literature review is a discussion and sharing of activities, suggestions, and strategies that I used throughout the school year to teach about interacting with others

under the umbrella of a curricular topic. For example, this involved integrating social skills when forming groups for a science project, or, teaching children to speak respectfully to one another while playing a math game. Further, I have compiled a list of picture books that will help to open up dialogue with students regarding issues of social interaction, specifically, inclusion, initiating and maintaining friendships, fair play and cooperation, speaking, listening, and body language skills, and conflict resolution. Read-alouds are a huge part of literacy programs and selecting books that focus on pro-social behaviour is a realistic way for elementary school teachers to integrate these topics.

As this project forwards, in order to have content and engaged students, we need to attend more to their emotional well-being and teach appropriate ways to interact. With the limited teaching time we have, however, we must find ways to weave relationship building and teaching emotional skills into our existing curriculum if we are to be successful.

Changes in Professional Thinking, Beliefs, Intentions, and Activity

Throughout my teaching career I have sought the right answers. I have read books, taken courses, and have involved myself in lengthy discussions with colleagues in order to uncover the secret to motivation, retention of information, and critical thinking skills. It was my pursuit of the correct way to teach that led me to begin this Masters program. Ironically, it was the realization during our initial two courses, Critical Discourses in Curriculum Studies and Emerging Trends and Topics in Curriculum Studies, that there is no holy grail of education. This shift in understanding is what paved the way for two years of rich learning. For at least a century, curricular theorists have explored and debated the best ways to educate our children. Although various modes of relaying knowledge and understanding resulted in no clear conclusions, what did consistently emerge was the necessity of paying attention to

our learners. Thus, letting go of the notion that there is a perfect way to teach and, understanding that education needs to be fluid, continuously changing as per the needs of our students, is what I took most from this Master of Education program.

Additionally, the idea that “curriculum is anywhere that learning occurs” and “for better or worse, the unintended learning is often the most powerful” (Stone, 2010, p.35) resonated with me and became a lens through which I now view what I am really teaching my students. Paying attention to the unintended learning means being aware of what you are modeling to your students. What are my students really learning if I give a lesson on recycling and then throw plastic into the garbage can? What about when I speak to the importance of being understanding to others but then become irritated with a late student and unwilling to listen to an explanation? Or, preach the importance of creativity in problem solving but insist that students only use one method to calculate problems? What we do and say when we are not delivering a lesson is far more likely to stay with our students.

Another way that my thinking has changed as a result of this program is that I now view the curriculum as a guideline rather than a stringent set of rules that must never be altered. I have spent the first half of my career attempting to cover every outcome in order to report on it. I now feel far more confident, as a result of my learning that I need to start putting kids, not reporting in the forefront. Focusing on covering everything as quickly as possible looks good on a report card but does not result in real learning. Being flexible and giving children what they need allows them to move forward.

Finally, over the course of the last two years, I have become more conscious of the importance of recognizing and valuing diversity in the classroom. In the past, I had envisioned my room as a little world unto itself. I felt that students would be best served if

they left their problems, emotions, etc., at the door prior to entering the world of learning that I had prepared for them. Although I still believe it is important for me to create a calm and secure environment for learning to occur, I now realize that I cannot shut out reality. The home lives of our students play a role in how engaged they are with school and how they learn. Whether we are attending to the cultural backgrounds of the children we teach or taking notice of the emotions that accompany them as they enter the classroom, it has become apparent to me that this is a must for relationship building and encouraging contented enthusiastic learners.

Affects of Graduate Experience on Teaching Career

I entered this program with the intent of examining and changing my practice and that is exactly what I had the opportunity to do. My teaching is altering as I am now trying to pay more attention to what is really important to my students. My intent is to use this experience to become a more effective and flexible educator in tune to what my students need rather than what a curriculum document dictates.

I have found that being a part of this Master of Education program has given me a different vision of teaching. Because I have become more cognizant of what is necessary to the education of our students, I am learning to let go of the perceived pressures of standardized tests and covering as much as possible in a short period of time. What I am finding is that this is allowing me to enjoy my day-to-day experiences in the classroom in a way that I never before felt was possible. This shift has created a more relaxed, happier climate in my class, which in turn has helped me to build better relationships with my students. The outcome has been engaged, more confident learners.

My graduate experience has also paved the way for rich collaboration with other staff members. I feel that I am a more valuable contributor to the field of education and I have started to become much more willing to have other teachers in the classroom with me. In the past I was uneasy about having others observe my teaching and I would often close my door to offers of team teaching or extra support. I am finding myself becoming open to having the assistance of other adults. I no longer feel insecure about teaching in the presence of other professionals and I recognize that I do not need to be a flawless educator to be effective. In fact, it is our vulnerabilities that can make us more approachable to our students and colleagues.

Finally, this program has given me the confidence to be willing to open dialogue with other educators either at my own school or at the district level. With the vast amount of research and theory that I have become familiar with, I feel that my opinions and philosophies are now supported. This has allowed me to engage in pedagogical discussions in a self-assured and broad-minded manner.

Key Recommendations for Other Educators Engaging with Project Topic

For educators interested in engaging with my project topic, my first piece of advice would be to make it your own. Teaching is a very personal profession. Although good pedagogy should always be at the forefront, adapting to one's own personal style is necessary. Choosing books for example that you enjoy is far more important than simply selecting for the purpose of teaching a social skill. You are likely to spend more time engaging with literature and the potential lessons that can be pulled from it when you are enthusiastic about it. The same goes for strategies that you use to teach positive interaction skills, they need to suit your teaching style.

Second, I would suggest flexibility. The purpose of this project was for me to become more aware of the social and emotional needs of my students and find ways to address those needs. I will no longer follow a program designed to teach social skills in a prescribed manner. Instead, I now feel that relationship building, modeling, integrating respectful interaction skills into all subject areas, and reaching out to families is what must be done. In order to do this, we must be willing to adapt our teaching as needs arise, and look for, or create, opportunities for this learning. Flexibility allows us to meet the needs of the various students that we are teaching.

Lastly, I would recommend that educators implement change using small steps. Too often we attend workshops, read inspiring books, and watch incredible presenters, resulting in the feeling that we must immediately change everything about our existing practice. Not only does this leave us feeling overwhelmed, but also, more times than not, it prevents us from changing at all. Educators are instead encouraged to start watching for small opportunities to teach children social skills and to incorporate this learning into what they are already teaching. I would also suggest that teachers look at how we talk to our students and other adults and honestly ask ourselves if we are modeling appropriate ways for our students to treat others. Furthermore, I would suggest starting to use literature as a way to open dialogue about tolerant and courteous ways of treating others. The majority of elementary school teachers use read alouds in their classes making this a simplistic way to take an initial small step to teaching positive interaction skills.

In summary, teachers need to remember that however they choose to engage with any new topic, it is important that they personalize what they are teaching, remain flexible, and start small.

Appendix One: Picture Book List

Inclusion (respecting differences, realizing that we are all different/unique)

Al Abdullah, R. & DiPucchio, K. (2010). *The sandwich swap*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.

Two best friends end up in a huge fight when they express their dislike for each other's choice of sandwich. A good book to encourage discussion about respecting differences.

Primary

Bruins, D. (2009). *The legend of ninja cowboy bear*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

Friends with different strengths compete to see who is best. Eventually they come to appreciate their differences. Primary

Clement, A. (1988). *Big Al*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

A classic book that teaches us to appreciate the unique qualities of others and not to pass judgment based on appearances. Primary

Forler, N. (2009). *Bird child*. Toronto, Canada: Tundra Books.

This is a moving book about a new student who is teased and ignored until the main character finds the courage to stand up for her. Beautiful illustrations. Intermediate

Krensky, S. (2007). *Big bad wolves at school*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Useful for talking about respecting the uniqueness and strengths of others. Primary/Early Intermediate

Schoonmaker, E. (2011). *Square cat*. New York, NY: Aladdin Publishing.

Being kind and accepting the differences of friends is the premise to this story. Primary

Uegaki, C. & Jorisch, S. (2003). *Suki's kimono*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

A young girl wears a kimono to school and deals with the reactions of her classmates. Could lead to a variety of discussions or writing pieces about how we would react to various fashions or traditional dress that differ from the norm.

Wells, R. (1998). *Yoko*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.

Yoko the kitten is teased at school for having sushi and red bean ice cream. Even the teacher's plans for a multicultural food day do not have the intended result until one student is brave enough to try her dish. A good book for not only discussing the importance of respecting differences, but also how it is often enough to have just one good friend. Primary

Williams, L. E. (2010). *The can man*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books.

A boy starts collecting cans to raise money to buy a skateboard after he sees a homeless man with his can collection. He ends up donating the money to the man who, in turn, finds and fixes up an old skateboard for him. A great book for initiating conversations about acceptance and understanding the varying circumstances of the lives of others.

Primary/Intermediate

Woodson, J. (2012). *Each kindness*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books.

This book explores inclusion in a powerful way through the story of a new girl to school that was completely left out, even after she made multiple attempts to make friends. The book's thought-provoking ending encourages discussion about the effect of our actions. Late

Primary/Intermediate

Initiating and Maintaining Friendships

Browne, A. (2008). *Little beauty*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

A simple story that highlights the power of friendship and sticking up for others. Primary

Corderoy, T. (2013). *Just right for two*. Somerville, MA: Nosy Crow.

Highlights the importance of making friends and letting people into your life.

Primary/Intermediate

Elliot, L. (2002). *Hunter's best friend at school*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

A young raccoon struggles with peer pressure when his best friend starts causing trouble at school. Primary

Hartt-Sussman, H. (2011). *Noni says no*. Toronto, Canada: Tundra Books.

Excellent book for addressing the importance of standing up for yourself and dealing with controlling friends. Primary/Intermediate

Jeffers, O. (2005). *Lost and found*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.

A boy goes on an adventure in an attempt to find a lost penguin's home only to come to the realization that what the penguin wanted was a friend. Primary/ Early Intermediate

Ludwig, T. (2013). *The invisible boy*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf

A beautiful story about a young, ignored boy named Brian who takes a chance and compliments a new student's work, leading to a new, unexpected friendship.

Primary/Intermediate

Maier, I. (2005). *When Lizzy was afraid of trying new things*. Washington, DC:

Magination Press.

A little sheep is encouraged to stop playing it safe and to take risks. What is really valuable in this book is how gently the sheep's friends encourage her. Primary

Munson, D. (2000). *Enemy pie*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

This is an entertaining book that can lead to good discussions on how to initiate friendships and learn to like others. Primary/Early Intermediate

Murphy, S. J. (2010). *Emma's friendwich*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

A book on strategies to make new friends. Early primary

Oldman, N. (2011). *The busy beaver*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

A careless beaver creates chaos and dangerous situations for his friends as he runs from one activity to another. When he is hit with a fallen tree, he realizes he has to be more careful. He starts by apologizing to his friends and sets out to make amends.

Primary/Intermediate

Ritchie, A. (2012). *Duck says don't!* Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

A fun picture book with eye-catching illustrations that addresses being an overbearing friend.

Primary/ Early Intermediate

Rodman, M. A. (2005). *My best friend.* New York, NY: Puffin Books.

A good story that addresses the issue of trying too hard to make someone like you.

Primary

Steig, W. (1971). *Amos and Boris.* New York, NY: Puffin Books.

An old, but timeless book about a mouse and a whale. These two unlikely friends both have opportunities to help one another. The author uses rich vocabulary. Primary/ Intermediate

Wallace, N. E. (2006). *The kindness quilt.* Las Vegas, NV: Amazon Publishing.

A useful book that draws attention to the little kind acts we do to maintain good relationships.

Primary

Stead, P. C. (2012). *A home for bird.* New York, NY: Roaring Book Press.

Vernon the toad finds a little blue bird and goes out of his way to help his lost new friend. A good resource for highlighting how kindness and compassion play a role in friendships.

Fair Play and Cooperation (taking turns, encouraging others, working together)

Binkow, H. & Reverend Ana (2011). *Howard B. Wigglebottom learns about sportsmanship: Winning isn't everything*. United States: Thunderbolt.

Primary children are entertained by the Howard B. Wigglebottom series that presents social skills in the context of an entertaining story. In this particular story, sportsmanship is addressed through the humorous antics of Howard. Primary

Lionni, L. (1963). *Swimmy*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

In this classic Leo Lionni tale, Swimmy the little fish shows how danger can be avoided through cooperation. Primary/Early Intermediate

Oldman, N. (2013). *Up the creek*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

A bear, a beaver, and a moose quarrel on their canoe trip. When they end up stranded on a rock, cooperation becomes necessary. Primary/Intermediate

Speaking, Listening, Body Language Skills (tone of voice, kindness, effect of our words and actions, manners)

Burnett, M. (2012). *Extra yarn*. New York, NY: Balzer & Bray.

A story about the magic of doing kind things for others. Primary/Intermediate

Cook, J. (2011). *The worst day of my life ever: My story about listening and following instructions (...or not!)*. Boys Town, NE: Boys Town Press.

A teaching book about the importance of listening to and following instructions. Primary

Cook, J. (2006). *Tattle tongue*. Chattanooga, TN: National Center for Youth Issues.

While more of a teaching tool than example of good literature, this book does entertain the students while explicitly teaching the difference between tattling and telling. Primary/ Early Intermediate

Cook, J. (2005). *My Mouth is a Volcano*. Chattanooga, TN: National Center for Youth Issues.

Clearly demonstrates the effects of interrupting and always talking out of turn in an entertaining manner. Primary/Early Intermediate

Cooper, I. (2007). *The golden rule*. New York, NY: Abrams Books for Young Readers.

A grandpa explains to his grandson the meaning of the golden rule. Primary

Cuyler, M. (2007). *Kindness is cooler, Mrs. Ruler*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Students in Mrs. Ruler's class are assigned ten kind acts for homework. Primary/Early Intermediate

Earnhardt, D. W. (2012). *Being Frank*. Brooklyn, NY: Flashlight Press.

A humorous book that teaches kids to be tactful. Primary/Intermediate

Gravett, E. (2008). *The odd egg*. New York, NY: Simon Schuster.

A unique book that would be useful for addressing the effects of our harsh words on others.

This book has many possibilities for great writing extensions. Primary/Early Intermediate

Javernick, E. (2010). *What if everybody did that?* Las Vegas, NV: Amazon Children;s
Publishing.

A book on taking responsibility and realizing that we need to be respectful of others.

Jones, C. (2012). *Lacey Walker, nonstop talker*. North Mankato, MN: Picture Window
Books.

Lacey Walker's world changes when she loses her voice and cannot talk for awhile. Useful
for recognizing the importance of listening. Primary

McCloud, C. (2006). *Have you filled a bucket today? A guide to daily happiness for kids*.
Northville, MI: Ferne Press.

A delightful book that analogizes kindness to filling a bucket. Primary/Intermediate

McKinley, C. (2002). *One smile*. Bellevue, WA: Illumination Arts.

This is a "pay it forward" kindness type of book. Useful for illustrating the effects of our
actions and words. Primary/Intermediate

Pett, M. (2014). *The girl and the bicycle*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

This is a wordless picture book about a young girl that works hard to save for a bicycle she sees in a store window. When she finally goes to purchase the bike, it has already been sold. Though sad, she uses the money to buy a tricycle for her younger brother.

Primary/Intermediate

Roberts, J. (2014). *The smallest girl in the smallest grade*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Little Sally quietly notices many incidents of bullying at school until she finally feels compelled to take a stand. Primary/Intermediate

Stein, D. E. (2012). *Because Amelia smiled*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

A beautiful book that encourages conversations about the impact of our small actions. Good for examining an author's intention. Primary/Intermediate

Underwood, D. (2010). *The quiet book*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

This would be the ideal resource to illustrate appropriateness of voice level. Each page contains a phrase and picture illustrating various forms of quiet (i.e., sleeping sister quiet, story time quiet, best friends don't need to talk quiet). This could also be used to create pattern class books for emergent writers. Primary

Underwood, D. (2011). *The loud book*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Each page contains a phrase and picture illustrating various forms of loudness (i.e., applause loud, surprise loud, crowded pool loud). This is the companion to *The Quiet Book*. Primary

Vail, R. (2002). *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

A book that illustrates a normally happy child's bouts with anger. Children can relate and reflect upon the effect of her angry words and actions. Primary

Walters, E. (2014). *Hope springs*. Toronto, Canada: Tundra Books.

A book that features a child's kindness towards those who were not kind to him.

Primary/Intermediate

Willis, J., & Ross, T. (2004). *Shhh!* New York, NY: Hyperion Books.

A shrew wants to share the secret of life; take the time to listen. Primary/Early Intermediate.

Winner, M. G., & Crooke, P. (2008). *You are a social detective! Explaining social thinking to kids*. Great Barrington, MA: Think Social Publishing.

A very clear way to address the consequences of our unexpected behaviour on others.

Although not an example of good literature, a powerful teaching tool for pro-social behaviour, necessitating its inclusion on this list. Primary/Intermediate

Conflict Resolution (teasing, dealing with anger toward others, feeling left out)

Berger, S. (2013). *Crankenstein*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

A fun book for addressing the issue of crankiness. Primary

Burnett, K. (1999). *Simon's hook: A book about teases and put-downs*. Felton, CA: GR Publishing.

When Simon is teased about his new haircut, his Grandma compares the teasing to fish hooks and gives him strategies to learn how “to not bite”. Primary/Early Intermediate

Button, L. (2013). *Willow finds a way*. Toronto, Canada: Kids Can Press.

Bossy Kristabelle threatens to uninvite everyone on her birthday list if they do not do as she says. A good book that shows that power of standing up for oneself. Primary/Early Intermediate

Gall, C. (2014). *Dog vs. cat*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

In this entertaining book, cat and dog struggle to share their bedroom. Useful for teaching about compromise. Primary/Early Intermediate

Gassman, J. (2012). *You get what you get*. New York, NY: Picture Window Books.

This books deals with accepting disappointment. Primary

Horvath, D. (2009). *Just like bossy bear*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.

When he notices that his best friend is starting to become bossy, Bossy Bear is encouraged to set a better example. Early Primary

Ludwig, T. (2004). *My Secret Bully*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press.

A young girl's best friend starts to act mean toward her. This explores what can happen when friendships change in a negative way. Late Primary/Intermediate

Ludwig, T. (2006). *Just kidding*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press.

This is a good intermediate book on how to handle teasing. Although it is a bit instructional, my grade four students enjoyed and could relate to the story. They noticed many commonalities between the strategies suggested in this book to those in other books on teasing. Late Primary/Intermediate

Manning, J. (2012). *Millie fierce*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.

A young, quiet girl is tired of feeling invisible to others. She becomes angry and decides to be mean to others in order to stand out and be noticed. Excellent for facilitating discussions on how to deal with feeling left out. Primary/ Early Intermediate

Marino, G. (2012). *Too tall houses*. New York, NY: Viking.

Rabbit and Owl are friends and neighbours until Rabbit's garden grows too tall blocking Owl's view. This is an enjoyable story that can lead to discussions around conflict resolution. Primary/Intermediate

O'Neill, A. (2002). *The recess queen*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Mean Jean is the recess bully. Katie Sue is new to the school and invites Jean to play in an attempt to stop her bossy ways. Primary

Otoshi, K. (2008). *One*. San Rafael, CA: Ko Kids Books.

One comes along and takes a stand against hot headed Red. A great book for discussions around bullying. Primary/Early Intermediate

Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. Hartford, CT:

McClelland and Stewart.

A classic tale of a young boy's bad day. Primary/Early Intermediate

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