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## A Comparative Case Study: An Examination of How Literature Assists Children Experiencing a Trauma

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A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW LITERATURE ASSISTS  
CHILDREN EXPERIENCING A TRAUMA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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December 2015

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To four little boys with huge problems and gigantic hearts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I like to think of life as a baton race in which we all participate. Each member of the race plays a different role in our lives. As we are running the race waiting for the baton to be handed to us, everything has been orchestrated to help us win the race. The coach has placed runners with the exact skill in place at different points along the way to help the team win. Those that are good at long distance running are placed in the middle of the race, those that can run a fast start are placed at the beginning of the race, and those that are good at sprinting are placed at the end of the race. Writing this dissertation has been much like being in a baton race. There have been people along the way that have met me on this journey pushing me along to the finish line. Some of these people have been academic professionals, some have been family, and some have been friends. Regardless of who was holding my baton, I was the one that had to take the initiative to grab it and continue running. However, without the other people in the race, I would not have been able to finish it. Here are the people in my baton race.

To begin, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell, for counseling me and guiding me through the writing process. She taught me how to write with excellence and her guiding hand helped this document come to fruition. Second, I would like to thank the committee, Dr. Estanislado Barrera, Dr. Suzanne Stauffer, and Dr. Michael Barton, for not only reading my document but providing input that pushed me to be a better writer, thinker, and scholar. Dr. Earl Cheek, former director of the School of Education at LSU also gave me much encouragement and guidance to finish the dissertation and he gave tips on how to handle my defense. For those efforts mentioned, I am greatly appreciative.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family. The financial support of my father and the loving prayers of my mother were always there to encourage me along the way. My children

who were reluctant when I told them I was going back to school have gracefully bent to my schedule demands and have continued to tell me to finish the degree no matter what it takes.

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Curry for connecting me with the school counselors. These school counselors need to be especially recognized as well for working with me to select students that would best benefit from the program. However, most importantly, this research would not be possible without my participants. Their generosity and willingness to share experiences that were often painful enabled me to learn about their life situations and the ways I could help them using bibliotherapy.

Lastly, I want to thank my brother, Brent Benoit, and my uncle, Randy Lissard, for constantly encouraging me to keep my goals in front of me and pushing me towards those goals. With their daily words of reassurance, I was able to accomplish my goal. Furthermore, being a part of the writing group was a crucial motivation to continue research and writing. I am enormously grateful to all of these people and to many others who I met along the way. It is because of their generosity, motivation, and assistance that I have been able to reach this milestone in my life. All the little children that I have taught over the years have given me insight on how dealing with real life issues can become the very agent that propels people to become healthier and happier individuals for them I am truly grateful.

In conclusion, as I was finishing this dissertation, I recalled the first plane ride that we took my son at age five on to Washington, D.C. The pilot did a terrible job taking off and landing the plane. There were a lot of bumpy movements. When we asked my son what he thought about his first plane ride he said, “All I have to say is that pilot needs a lot of practice.” This is how I felt when I began the dissertation process. I needed a lot of practice, however, with the assistance of professors and the writing group my writing is not so bumpy anymore.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This case study, of four elementary school students as participants, examined the use of books and bibliotherapy when experiencing a traumatic incident. Utilizing fiction books, I explored how literature could be a powerful tool for overcoming life-altering events and circumstances, such as losing a pet, going through a divorce, or dealing with a grandparent who is suffering from Alzheimer's, with a bully in school, or the death of a loved one. Bibliotherapy could also be effective when used with individuals that stutter, children with dyslexia, and children coping with death or a parental mental illness. For this study, the data was collected through interviews, journals, and audio tapings. Analysis was completed using the grounded theory method. The participants were four students, ages from seven to nine, from two elementary schools. The results indicated that literature as a medium was effective when used with children who were overcoming a specific emotional trauma.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Teaching for me, is the most rewarding job. Through my experiences as first a teacher then following as a mother of four children, I have gained wisdom in learning how books can be an effective tool when dealing with life-altering traumas. The following vignette serves to illustrate how I came to understand and then study bibliotherapy as a viable means of assisting children through literature.

When I was working in an elementary school as a first grade teacher, I met Eleanor (all names in this study are pseudonyms) in my classroom. The little girl often acted defensive, and one could notice fear in her expression if caught off guard. It seemed like there was something bothering the child and I often wondered if there was something that I could do to help her. Sometimes, Eleanor even got in fights with her classmates, slapping them in the face. I remember a situation where we were lining up for class pictures. I was placing the children from shortest to tallest. When I realized Eleanor was taller than the child in front of her, I went and switched the placement of the child. When Eleanor realized that the child was now in front of her, she abruptly slapped the child across the face. We took the picture and the child that had been slapped had a huge red mark across his face. It was terrible. She was unhappy because in her mind she thought she had been skipped and this was just one incident that I can recall. There were many others that were evident that she had some emotional problems. The child often acted out and would lie on the floor groaning like she was in pain. I was worried and decided to talk to a school counselor hoping to find out what was behind that kind of behavior. I became increasingly concerned, both for Eleanor as well as her classmates, and waited for parents of children in the class to begin to complain regarding Eleanor's behavior. They never did. Instead they had genuine compassion for the child and saw her as

someone that had some deep-rooted issues. From the conversation with the school counselor, I learned that the girl was physically abused at home. Eleanor was going through therapy, and later her mother was working with me to help her function emotionally stable at school. I knew Eleanor needed help and tried to engage her in classroom activities, but she was resistant at first. Finally, one day I asked her to come and sit on my lap for us to read a book together. I selected a short story with a lot of pictures about a little girl that felt sad all the time. The little girl in the story had a mean stepfather who treated her badly and often beat her without any reason. After reading the book, Eleanor suddenly pulled closer to me and gave me a big hug. I noticed her shoulders were quivering; she was crying. It was at that moment in my career when I realized that books could be used as a powerful tool to help children cope with their traumatic problems.

That experience with Eleanor made me think about thousands of other children going through traumatic life events. Those events may vary from physical abuse, to death of a loved one, or being bullied at school or in the neighborhood, or loss of a favorite pet. As parents, educators, and adults who care about those children, we want to find ways for them to cope with their emotional struggles. The ways to ease the emotional pains can be as varied as engaging in sports, extracurricular activities, and different clubs based on children's interests, or simply by reading books. The latter is close to me because it is my personal and professional preference. That is why the present dissertation study was designed to investigate possible understandings of whether literature as a medium is effective when used with children who were overcoming a specific life-altering event. As researcher, I examined literature as a means to deal with problems in everyday life. Thus begins my research journey with bibliotherapy.

## **Personal Connection to Bibliotherapy**

Conducting this study, I intended to determine whether literature is a strong component in assisting people who had gone through a traumatic experience. The idea and need for the study partially came from my personal traumatic experience and pain. Fifteen years ago, I lost a baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). It was a beautiful September morning. My twelve-month-old daughter Claire had just had her first birthday. She was sitting in her highchair eating lunch. My daughter Madeline had been sick with a cold. I was unable to get her to rest, and we were told by the doctor to sit in the bathroom with a steamy shower running to help with her congestion. My husband, at the time, Robert was on the couch reading a book and nursing his own cold. I rocked Madeline to sleep and placed her in her bassinet in the bedroom. I told Claire, "You have crumbs all over your dress. Let's bring you outside and dust you off." I took Claire outside, and immediately a terrible feeling came over me. I knew something was wrong with Madeline. I dashed into the house and to her bassinet only to find her not breathing. I brought her into the den and yelled to Robert to call 911. As he did, I began CPR on Madeline. Claire wrapped her arms around my neck and began singing her ABC's. I almost immediately heard the ambulance and fire truck zooming to our house. The dispatcher on the line could hear Claire, and she told me, "Ma'am, your baby seems to be okay." I screamed, "No!" There is another baby here who is not breathing. When the fireman and ambulance workers walked in, I yelled at them, "Where is the equipment?" I thought they would have a defibrillator with them to shock my baby's chest and get her heart to start beating again. They just shook their heads and picked her up. I rode upfront in the ambulance as we dashed to the hospital. I kept looking back to see if she was moving, but most of all I was praying that God would give Madeline life. We arrived at the hospital, and the doctors asked us if there was any SIDS in the family. My dad went back to see her, and when he came out, he said, "She is gone." I couldn't believe this was

happening to me. I had done so many things right in my life, and I thought because I was a good person that nothing so traumatic could ever happen to me. I held Madeline for four hours in the emergency room waiting for the coroner to show up. When he did, he walked in with a large body bag took her from my arms and zipped her up in the bag. I thought, “Where is the human element of decency?” Couldn’t he have asked us to leave the room and told us to say our goodbyes before doing something so inhuman in front of me and my family.

It was a long and painful road to recovery for me. Using books helped me personally deal with the grief. My other children experienced bibliotherapy as well to cope with their loss. Literature was a prevailing tool in ushering us from despair to a place where we now have peace about the death of our Little Madeline. In my own experience, literature was a healing balm for the hurt that we, as a family, experienced. I have also used bibliotherapy for a more recent trauma as my mother is battling brain cancer; I am participating in a support group where we are using a grief handbook to overcome life problems.

My personal experiences and ways to deal with traumatic incidents made me think and explore how others would react to the similar coping and healing approaches. That is why the purpose of this study is to see if the use of literature as transferable in dealing with problems and whether the use of literature coupled with a trauma is effective in helping a person develop the stage of universality. Along the way, I have experienced a recursive exposure to different stages of bibliotherapy. At times, I found I was going through identification where I related to someone who also lost a child. Other times, I experienced a feeling of catharsis that dealt with the emotional attachment to my daughter. The perspective of universality has also been reached at times but there is a love of a mother in me that still wishes my daughter was here. Whenever we celebrate Mother’s Day I take a picture with my three living children. I often wonder and try to imagine what that photograph would look like if Madeline was in the middle of my two older

girls. There are no easy answers to traumas such as the one that I went through, but there is something to be said about the strength that has forced me to endure such terrible pain. When Madeline died people told me that her death would make me a stronger person. Now, reflecting on all the years that she has not been with me I do not think that I am a stronger person because of her death. Instead, I find that I am a more sensitive person one that cherishes every interaction with the people in my life especially my three living children. It is such a pleasure to do the little things in life like picking them up from camp and enjoying a ride home having good conversation and hearing them sing the latest songs on the radio. I think embracing Madeline's death has taken me down a road where I have engaged in despair and hope. Bibliotherapy assisted me and my children to address the trauma of death of a loved one in a real and personalized way. The purpose of this study is to examine how literature assists specific children experiencing a traumatic obstacle and to identify and confirm the benefits of bibliotherapy as an effective tool for recovery of selected children affected by traumatic life situations.

### **Defining Literature**

The term "literature" has multiple definitions characterizing its various facets. One of the common definitions states that literature is writings in which expression and form, in connection with ideas of permanent and universal interests, are characteristic or essential features, as poetry, novels, history, biography, and essays" (see: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/literature>). For the purpose of this study, literature for bibliotherapy is defined as those fiction or nonfiction selections that allow not only communicating issues of controversy to the readers, but also helping them relate, identify, and make efforts to resolve those issues. In other words, literature for bibliotherapy is those novels and stories about characters who have similar traumas, obstacles, issues, situations, and problems as the children with whom I am working (Hébert, 1991).



## **The Power of Literature: A Case for Using Bibliotherapy**

Literature is a powerful tool that can be used by children when dealing with traumatic situations. The question of whether or not books help resolve problems and to what extent they do is the focus of this study.

Bibliotherapy has been defined by many different schools of thought (Rush, 2003; Delaney, 1928-1953), and there are different meanings for various schools of thought. For instance, librarians may have one definition and resultant views for bibliotherapy; the medical profession has another definition and perspective for bibliotherapy, and educators hold a differing definition and perspective as well. In the 1960s, bibliotherapy became one of many controversial topics that took center stage as librarians were being sued for calling themselves “therapists.” After shying away from the topic for many years, now librarians and the medical community are re-embracing bibliotherapy as a tool to assist individuals in overcoming obstacles, issues, traumas, and problems. As a means to provide help to the children struggling with emotional and physical pain, a reconnection surfaced with professionals and the concept of using bibliotherapy. Teachers have also used books in an attempt to assist students who are coping with personal issues. In order to understand how bibliotherapy was applied in the dissertation, I first discuss the definitions of bibliotherapy in different fields.

Bibliotherapy books have been used since the time of the Ancient Greeks and were called the “healing place for the soul” (Stroud, Stroud, & Staley, 1999). While bibliotherapy has had a controversial historical perception among researchers, empirical data suggests that by using books an individual’s anxiety can subside (Betzael & Shechtman, 2010). It is important to note that all problems the participating children are dealing with in this study will be preexisting problems; however, following the requirements of the Instructional Review Board (IRB), none of the participants had abuse in their background. Since I am not a professional psychologist, I

cannot provide counseling to children who have been abused. Situations that necessitate professional attention are outside of my area of expertise. However, as a researcher and reading specialist, I can participate in bibliotherapy because it is a common method used by teachers and librarians. Since teaching and familiarity with librarians is the area of my expertise, I was able to adequately select books and provide writing prompts that would encourage the participants to go through the four stages of bibliotherapy. These prompts were often gathered after reading and reflecting on each individual book.

### **Definitions of Bibliotherapy**

When focusing on bibliotherapy, a concise definition of the term to establish a scholarly standard is essential. While bibliotherapy has its origins in the medical field, its use has shifted, and bibliotherapy is now often found in schools and libraries. Within the medical profession, clinical studies on what is termed cognitive bibliotherapy have been conducted (Rush, Galt, II). Cognitive bibliotherapy has been defined as a standardized treatment for mild to moderate stress and anxiety (Rush, Galt, II). In educational circles, bibliotherapy may be focused on the student in a developmental manner. As Hébert (1991) denoted, bibliotherapy “is a counseling technique for helping people deal with their problems through reading novels or stories about characters who have similar problems” (p. 5-6). Books are considered useful tools when working with people and can be used to help them develop a positive self-concept (Hébert, 1991). When books are used properly, attitudes may change, a person’s values may develop ethically, and the whole personality of an individual can be altered (Hébert, 1991). As a less threatening tactic, reading can help people become engaged in the developmental process of grieving over a loss or even to the extreme of developing self-character.

*The Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (2011) defines bibliotherapy as:

The use of books selected on the basis of content in a planned reading program designed to facilitate the recovery of patients suffering from mental illness or emotional disturbance. Ideally, the process occurs in three phases: personal identification of the reader with a particular character in the recommended work, resulting in psychological catharsis, which leads to rational insight concerning the relevance of the solution suggested in the text to the reader's own experience. Assistance of a trained psychotherapist is advised. (2011)

I will use this definition as guiding tool throughout this dissertation as it reflects my understanding of bibliotherapy and its purpose. One last stage not mentioned in the definition is the stage of universality, which is the ultimate goal of having a participant recognize that they are not the only one going through a particular situation. This stage is especially important in the process because it brings some closer to the particular obstacle that the person is going through. It is imperative to mention that the children who participated in the case study were directly connected to a school counselor who I had open access to. The children when sharing sensitive information were able to stay connected to their parents through these two school counselors.

### **The Term Bibliotherapy**

The answer to the question of who first coined the term bibliotherapy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is debatable. Ouzts (1991) stated that in 1930, Ireland first began the discourse on conceptualizing the idea of using literature to offer solutions to modern problems, thereby minimizing students' inner turmoil. Moreover, Ouzts indicated that Samuel Crothers coined the term in 1916. Crothers was a Protestant preacher who stood against slavery and was an activist for the rights of marginalized groups. The concept gained popularity and is now functioning in both cognitive and developmental settings. As educational settings are becoming more diverse, teachers and librarians have found great impact using bibliotherapeutic techniques with students (Ouzts, 1991). These methods help educators target the individual learner by matching reading materials to the needs of each learner in order to facilitate student achievement and development.

Bibliotherapy became an organized subject in the 1930s when librarians began to compile lists of written materials that were intended to help people change their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors for therapeutic reasons (Pardeck, 1994). This was about the same time that nurses were using bibliotherapy with war victims to help them overcome trauma from fighting in WWI. The significant stages have been highlighted in the previously provided text. Studying the topic of bibliotherapy, I looked at my participants through a transformative lens that seems to be the most appropriate to understanding the life-altering changes that are taking place. The theoretical approach involving a transformative lens will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### **Cognitive and Developmental Bibliotherapy**

In defining bibliotherapy, it is necessary to note that there are two types of bibliotherapy—cognitive and developmental. The terms cognitive and clinical are used interchangeably in the bibliotherapy research literature (Delaney, Galt, II). Regardless of the type, the consensus is that when reading the literature concerning the topic, an effective, guided discussion must be presented. As school librarians and teachers, the developmental route is the primary goal of educators. Typically, cognitive bibliotherapy takes place in a structured setting and is facilitated by a counselor, therapist, or psychologist to treat individuals experiencing serious emotional or behavioral problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Conversely, developmental bibliotherapy, which is much more applicable for school practitioners, is most appropriate for the school media center or classroom and uses guided reading to facilitate an interaction between readers' personalities and literature (Hébert & Furner, 1997). As depicted by Hébert and Furner (1997), school personnel can use developmental bibliotherapy in several ways. Practitioners may identify students' concerns, address relevant social or emotional issues to prevent problems from arising, and, lastly, guide the future stages of childhood and adolescence. The presence of the school counselor on site and available to me was important

because in the event that there was an emotional melt down the school counselor could step in and assist me in dealing with the emotions that were being displayed by the students.

Also, in the area of developmental bibliotherapy: (a) bibliotherapy should provide relevant information that will help students gain confidence in their abilities to overcome a problem; (b) students should gain insight into a specific problem or experience; (c) bibliotherapy should provide students with alternate solutions to given problems; (d) discussion should be stimulated to help identify the given situation at hand; (e) and it should be generated, with new values to a problem; and lastly and most importantly, (f) in the bibliotherapeutic session, students should understand that they are not the only ones who have experienced a given problem (Pardeck, 1995, p. 67-68).

### **Stages of Bibliotherapy**

According to the studies, an individual usually goes through four stages when bibliotherapy is used for developmental persuasion using fictional books. These stages are: identification, catharsis, insight, and universality (Pardeck, 1995). Shrodes (1949) was the first to link the first three stages of bibliotherapy together. We add universality to these terms to meet a goal of identifying that people are not going through a problem all by themselves. The importance of the "changing" process in conducting bibliotherapy is the essential expected outcome. It is essential to engage the practitioner and the participant in a manner that becomes a "win-win" scenario. Following is an explanation of the four stages of bibliotherapy.

#### **Identification**

In the identification stage individuals recognize that situations, characters, and settings found in various readings are similar to those in their own lives (Slyter, 2012). The identification process is important, and practitioners must be avid readers to help participants match their given problems with appropriate pieces of literature.

Since I have a background in reading education, this particular study is appropriate with my own professional development. A child who is going through a divorce may want to read about divorcing homes and combining new families together. Ultimately, I used fiction books to establish a good rapport with my participants. Many of the selections were made through my knowledge of books from being certified as a school librarian. The needs of the participants varied, and I had to gather materials that highlighted the specific obstacle that the individuals were undergoing. The particular age and reading level of each child was taken into account as well. The two main topics that I dealt with in regards to book gathering were dealing with a death of a parent and going through a divorce. These were the eminent problems that seemed to be occurring in the participants' lives. Therefore, the identification stage was one that enabled the participants to identify with the characters in the books.

### **Catharsis**

The next stage of bibliotherapy is called catharsis. During this period, individuals become more emotionally involved in the story they are reading (Slyter, 2012). It is during the catharsis stage that participants begin to find a deeper meaning in the book and its characters and start to relate the story to their own problems or situations (Slyter, 2012). Catharsis is an emotional experience and should be followed by journal entries and reflections from the reader-participant. When catharsis is taking place, often there is an emotional connection that indicates that there is a change that is occurring. Once again, determining the level of change and how that change affected the reader was important to this case study. During catharsis it is common for individuals to show emotions such as tearing up or crying. As researcher, it was important for me to gauge these emotions and be aware of any potential problems that may warrant counseling on the part of the participant.

## **Insight**

Insight is the third stage of bibliotherapy, and it allows participants to apply the outcomes of the stories to their own lives (Slyter, 2012). Insight is a process that occurs on an individual level and evolves through reading the book and identifying with characters. Insight is that process allowing growth and a feeling of accomplishment to occur on the part of the reader-participant that evokes understanding of the problem that they are facing. In life there are many situations where we may gain insight into a particular obstacle in our collection of experiences. Sometimes the catalyst for that insight comes from an outside person or book or life-altering experience. When bibliotherapy is taking place, insight may occur from the relationship the person has with the book. Insight is therefore, the process where the participant develops an acute understanding of the problem they are coping with in relation to the book and the characters that are in the book.

## **Universality**

Finally, if bibliotherapy is a success, participants will reach the stage of universality (Slyter, 2012). In this last stage, they realize that their own issues are shared with others, and their empathy and sensitivity is enhanced. In modern literature there are numerous topics, settings, and characters to enable readers to experience catharsis, and it is the role of the practitioner to lead readers to appropriate selections. During this last stage, it is the element of change in the participants that I closely assessed. The individuals should have the understanding that they are not the only ones that can identify with a given problem. Universality can be a life-changing event because there is power in numbers, and when we begin to demonstrate the ability to overcome our own problems, we have the ability to realize how situations and obstacles can be avenues for growth in our lives.

It is important to note that although there are four stages, they are not experienced sequentially. There are possibilities for the participants to visit the stages in a recursive manner. This experience is found to be energizing as the participants can go through some of the stages at the same time and then revisit other stages along the way.

### **Implementation of Bibliotherapy**

Pardeck (1995) suggested basic strategies in the implementation of bibliotherapy that assisted in conducting the case studies. First he posited that practitioners need to identify the problem, the situation, the behavior, or the skill that needed to be acquired. This process may evolve out of another professional's observation of the participant. Essential to the overall success of the study was selecting the right tool to assess progress once the problems have been identified, appropriate reading materials distributed, and reading begun. The tool must enable the determination of whether or not literature has an impactful effect when dealing with people and their problems (Pardeck, 1995).

### **A Transformative Lens as Theoretical Frame**

In order to properly evaluate these four case studies using a transformative lens, I linked the thoughts and theories of critical theorists, such as Marx, (1848) Adorno, (1947) Marcuse, (1966) and Freire (1997); four scholars who gave meaning to the transformative worldview of thinking and gathering knowledge. "The transformative approach arose during the 1980s and 1990s among individuals who felt that post-positivist assumptions imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals in society, or issues of power and social justice, discrimination, and oppression that needed to be addressed" (Creswell, 2014, p. 9).

As stated by Mertens (2010), the transformative worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and an agenda of political change to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs. The transformative worldview does not consist of a



body of literature; rather, it consists of a group of theorists who have formulated the concept of critical theory being imperative to the progression of thoughts and theories. Topics such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation are all issues of empowerment with the transformative worldview.

Transformative research allows marginalized groups to have a voice and often these groups are involved in the process of gathering and analyzing information (Creswell, 2014). The ultimate goal is to reform or change a situation due to the research being conducted. The worldview may be associated with looking at how marginalized groups have been oppressed or neglected. Creswell stated, “In studying these diverse groups, the research focuses on inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class that result in asymmetric power relationships” (Creswell, 2014, p.10). In the case of this study, the children undergoing emotional trauma can be considered an atypical group because they are different from the mainstream children population and their personal situations place them into a position of inequality.

### **Intersection of the Works of Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, and Freire**

There is an apparent intersection of the writings of Marx (1948), Adorno(1947), Marcuse (1964;1966), and Freire (1997;2000). All four spoke out in response to some type of war or oppressor/oppressed situation in the societies in which they were members. Criticized by most during their times of writing and presenting, they were later recognized as notable authors and contributors to critical theory. Although each of these theorists dealt with social issues, they all have become contributors in the area of education and the development of progressive thought in curriculum and instruction. Their points of view are still questioned by some scholars, but their stamina in the field has proven to be substantial as they all focused on the transformative viewpoint. It is this worldview that is becoming increasingly accepted as marginalized groups

such as feminists, queer theory advocates, disability groups, and disadvantaged groups are rising up to seize their rights and the rights of those who are affected by their situations. Thus these theorists represent progressive thought and can be drawn upon as a frame for this study, an investigation about the efficacy of using literature as a means of assistance for those who have suffered a trauma.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The main purpose of the study was to examine how literature could be a powerful tool for overcoming life-altering events and circumstances for children. An overarching question that framed the study was: How bibliotherapy can be an assistive method of helping an individual deal with the trauma of either a life-altering event or coming to terms with the trauma of either a life-altering event or coming to terms with marginalization? The study consists of three specific questions:

- 1) Does literature impact a child going through a significant trauma, and if yes, how?
- 2) What are the changes in the child's feelings, if any, when using bibliotherapy?
- 3) What are the commonalities and differences among the four different children going through traumatic life experience and using bibliotherapy?

In Chapter 2, I present a review of literature that encompasses trauma and efficacy of bibliotherapy. Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the research study I proposed. In Chapter 4, I present and discuss findings, and in Chapter 5, I offer implications and recommendations based on the results of this proposed study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that it draws on the presumption that literature can actually change the scope of how people approach trauma in their life. If, in fact, literature can be the catalyst to change individuals' dispositions and the way they handle trauma in their lives, then it

can be used more profusely. Books have been used for centuries to aid individuals dealing with problems. A determination whether there is a link to dealing with problems and reading narrative and informational books is critical in identifying the ways of assisting children to overcome life obstacles and become viable citizens of our society.

The participants benefited from the study because going through personal interviews and journaling helped them understand better their experiences and problems. While for some of them, the study was challenging in terms of accepting personal emotional struggles, for the others, it was the beginning of the healing process. Thus, in any case, the study moved the participants towards facing and overcoming their problems.

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized due to a very limited number of participants, they add to the body of research on bibliotherapy and further down the exploring of the topic. Moreover, the findings inform future research about the directions and possibilities to study young adults and adults going through life-changing experiences. There is a misconception that bibliotherapy is best to be used with children; however, I believe that other age groups can benefit from using literature to cope with their problems.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bibliotherapy can be a useful tool and strategy to use with children of many age ranges who have experienced a trauma caused by various situations, circumstances, and life-altering events. Research that highlights the utility of bibliotherapy informs this study. In this chapter, I will discuss the definition of trauma and explore how research literature explores bibliotherapy when dealing with bullying, death, autism, and depression, and how bibliotherapy is practiced in school settings.

### **Defining Trauma**

Since this multiple case study will be investigating participants that are experiencing a trauma, it is important to define trauma. The word trauma originates from a Greek word, meaning wound (Gordan, 2007). Substantial trauma occurs when people have an inability to cope with and respond to a perceived threat that is overwhelming. Traumatic events usually involve a situation where people have a threat to their own body and even may have a close encounter with death. Generally, when confronted by a traumatic event, people can develop a sense of urgency that forces them into a catastrophe. The person's age and their previous exposure to trauma play a factor in the way they respond to a traumatic event. Pfluger (2013) proposed "that commonly identified traumatic events include the following situations: sexual or physical assault, terrorism, torture, domestic violence, accidents, neglect occurring in childhood, being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, man-made and natural disasters, being held hostage and sexual molestation of children" (Pfluger, 2013, p. 45-46).

Pfluger (2013) goes further to describe the simple and complex scenarios of trauma. Complex trauma significantly affects a person's ability to function in the world. On the other hand, simple trauma is less likely to have severe side effects such as the depression and disorders found in complex traumatic situations. Trauma therapy has been noted to be found in several

forms and assists in an individuals' ability to cope with a situation. For this multiple case study, using a bibliotherapeutic technique is the focus of the study. Since the individual participants are going through a trauma it is important to provide resources other than my input in the case that the children need additional assistance to cope with their particular obstacle.

Trauma if not treated properly can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can cause a person to relive the experiences of the trauma in a way that cripples them from being able to function in a healthy way in their world. Some people tend to try to isolate themselves from the reality of the event, and this circumstance can lead to further depression and heartache. The intent of this research is to prevent (PTSD) from manifesting and, if it is in fact present, have a professional therapist on hand to cope with the disorder. In many cases the possible candidates for this study who seemed suitable were not allowed to participate because the parents did not want to deal with the issue at hand. There were at least about ten children who were suggested for the study by school counselors only to be denied access by their parents. This tells me that the topic of trauma and especially with children is a sensitive one and cannot be easily investigated. When I began the process of gathering participants I first started with posting flyers in local libraries advertising the study. Unfortunately, there was no apparent interest drawn from this type of solicitation. I then began to gather assistance from Dr. Black who in turn sent out a blanket email to all school counselors in the parish and surrounding parishes. This effort was the catalyst that brought me in contact with the participants that were part of the study. While speaking with several counselors, I encountered situations where children were being bullied or had the loss of a parent. However, there parents were not interested in having them participate in the study. Gathering participants took me four months and the time period of running into school holidays was a challenge as I was delayed by the IRB board due to their inability to gain quorum in the fall for their regular

scheduled meeting. This missive forced me to delay the information gathering to mainly the Spring of 2015. Trauma in young children is difficult to identify, and even more challenging to unravel. In many cases children are left to cope with their traumatic obstacles on their own which can lead to failure in school academics and difficulty getting along with their peers.

Individual trauma can be caused by many different circumstances. Interpersonal trauma is “pervasive globally and may result in long-term consequences physically, cognitively, behaviorally, socially, and spiritually” (Bryant & Davis, 2005). Some situations call for religious coping and involve support from faith communities. There has been noted a decrease in psychological distress when people undergo managing their emotional condition in this manner. There are some positive ways that participants can deal with trauma on a spiritual level. These include a belief that God was present at the time of the trauma, which promotes a sense of human justice. Situations that were mentioned in Bryant-Davis and Wong (2013) include child abuse, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking. These are just a few of the situations that may require an individual going through trauma to rely on their faith in God. Since trauma can be divided into two categories—acute trauma and long-term trauma—events surrounding the necessary type of treatment is important (Kanewishcher, 2013).

One study that centered on trauma examined children who were removed from their abusive homes and placed in foster care services or adoptive care (Kanewischer, 2013). When looking at Kanewischer’s case study, children responded in two different ways. They either became passive or agitated: “Children who are separated from their abusive parents have mixed emotions; they either feel a sense of relief to be in a safe environment or a sense of concern for the safety for their abusive parents” (Kanewischer, 2013). In this situation, books were used to help children make the transition from their abusive homes to a safe environment. As denoted by Timmerman, Martin, and Martin (1989), “books can give children a way to reflect on their own

experiences, see examples of positive behaviors, express emotions, and develop critical thinking skills.”

Furthermore, Pardeck (1995) listed positive outcomes from using bibliotherapy. In his study, the children were ages eight years old or younger. The facilitator developed a trusted relationship with the child and the adult that was designated to be the legal guardian of the child. Also, it is important to note that the children were not currently in an abusive situation. The research suggested meaningful discussion questions to be asked to the children helping them delve down deep into the emotions that they were feeling after being removed from an abusive environment. Follow-up activities were suggested and implemented in order to help assist in the healing process. Making memory bracelets, developing a family tree, and drawing a house of emotions where people were placed in different parts of the home and given emotions designated by the child were some of the activities targeting resolving emotional instability.

Dealing with the population of children that have been removed from their homes is just one scenario whereby bibliotherapy can be utilized. Recent research focuses on the impact of bullying and the following section discusses the ways bibliotherapy can assist within this population.

### **Bibliotherapy with Divorce and Stepfamilies**

Wolf and Wolf (1998) recognize that in the past finding books about divorce was difficult. Today, supportive groups in the literary community have begun to place emphasis on the importance of creating selections that discuss families that are splitting up and getting a divorce. Wolf and Wolf (1998) supply their readers with an annotated list of books found in categories such as nonfiction, fiction, unrealistic, understanding love, dealing with anger, fantasies, learning that love can end, single parent fiction, and facing reality. They provide book titles that can be used with particularly adolescents who are dealing with separation and divorce.

Olsen (1975) discusses that children with problems can lead to difficulties in education and their socialization in social settings. This component of having difficulties in the personal lives of those going through a trauma seems to be recursive. Thus, Olsen suggests bibliotherapy as a method to influence a child's personality in a positive manner. Olsen sites Gates who suggested, "that in a wholehearted reading activity the child does more than they understand and contemplate; his emotions are stirred; his attitudes and purposes are modified; indeed his innermost being is involved" pp. 3-4). Olsen promotes that it is important to allow the child's interpretation of the words written in a book based on his or her own experiences. Planned reading such as bibliotherapy needs to be conducted in a controlled environment. The research makes suggestions for librarians and teachers separately. For librarians, the literature must mirror the life experiences of the child. The child can relate to experiences in his own life and gain understanding of his particular dilemma. Olsen believes that the librarian can deal with children with more severe problems while the teacher may deal with more social oriented problems. For the teacher, bibliotherapy may be used as therapeutic or preventive. For the therapeutic avenue, a teacher may vicariously attempt to introduce a book to a child who may experience the same problem through literature. In preventive bibliotherapy, the teacher attempts to introduce literature that will attain to something that will take place in the child's future. Regardless, Olsen attests that individuals participating in the implementation of bibliotherapy must be very familiar with children's books. Resources for librarians and teachers may include but are not limited to *The Horn Book*, *The Library Journal*, a local librarian, and annotations written on the outside of a book. A good filing system is suggested for bibliotherapist to use note cards with basic information of the card such as author, title, publication date, a brief summary, and the basic topic. The cards and books should be arranged



in categories, and Olsen gives some suggestions for categories, such as siblings, handicaps, and personal appearance.

It is also suggested by Olsen (1975), that teachers or librarians practice either group sessions with students having similar life struggles like going through a divorce or conducting one on one sessions with a student suffering with a more severe problem like the death of a parent. Ultimately, the research promotes that you have to have “the right book to the right child” (p. 428). A child must be ready to participate in bibliotherapy in order for positive results and responses to occur. Thus, it is more important that the materials are suggested not prescribed. The overall content that is provided and the style that it is presented in are critical to the success of the program. Olsen (1975) cautions not to let reading serve as an escape for children but an alternative to how they may learn to cope with trauma in their lives.

Manning and Casbergue (2015) address the image of the stepfamily today. The overarching theme of the wicked stepmother has been noted in literature since Greek mythology (Manning & Casbergue, 2015). Children are highly influenced by fairy tales and the portrayal of the stepmother in these stories; therefore, this perception leaves them with a terrible image and understanding of the role a stepmom can play in their life. Statistics reveal that the rates of children being a member of a stepfamily have risen since 1965 where there were 8 million U.S. “stepchildren under the age of 18.” In 1984, Gray and Pippin “reported 1,150,000 children would become stepchildren through divorce 850,000 or the death of a parent 300,000” (Manning & Casbergue, 2015, p. 124). Considering these rising statistics, it is likely that most teachers will encounter a child in their reading class who has experienced separation or divorce. The life-altering changes that go into forming a new family range from as simple as getting to know the stepparent to as complex as dealing with stepbrothers and sisters and possibly a new baby added to the mix of the sibling population. Manning and Casbergue suggest bibliotherapy as a perfect

avenue to introduce children of stepfamilies that are going through life situations that are different from their peers to accept their new home. New family structures require children to experience change at an early age; therefore, books can provide healthy insights to how to recover from these changes. Since there are so many stereotypes of stepfamilies, and these are traditionally seen in a negative light, it is important for the teacher or librarian to use knowledge and experience when selecting the books for the children of this population. Furthermore, Manning and Casbergue agree that books are not the only solution to help overcome the challenge of being a part of a stepfamily, but they concur that with the assistance of other resources books can help resolve some difficult issues in a child's life.

Sullivan (1987) proposes that for children going through a divorce previewing the problem that they are undergoing through a pyramid structure is helpful. This structure consists of examining a story's situation, applying it to life, and then applying it to oneself. Helping children understand that other families go through divorce is important and drawing conclusions from readings helps the children cope. Using open-ended discussion questions gives ownership over a child's work and is recommended for these children. The key element that Sullivan communicates is that a read aloud text for the purpose of bibliotherapeutic purposes and a simple read aloud both focus on the importance of discussion questions. Thus, reading to children can serve as more than one purpose and using books to overcome problems has become popular among teachers and librarians.

### **Bibliotherapy and Children of Alcoholics**

While helping children cope with divorce and stepfamilies is important, there is another population of children that can benefit from bibliotherapy. These are children who are victims of parents or caretakers that are alcoholics. "An estimated 15 million school aged youngsters have a parent who suffers from alcoholism – a disease that damages children as well as parents"

(Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1974, p. 720). Hiding this problem is problematic because children feel shame from the fact that they are victims to this disease. Sometimes alcoholism in the family is not noted until a child exhibits negative behavior or when adolescents begin to drink on their own. Using a book to introduce a character that is going through a similar situation is a perfect way to get children to open up about the endangering situation at home. Bibliotherapy can serve as a means to be an intervention that will prevent the cycle of alcoholism to continue in a family.

### **Bibliotherapy and Bullying**

In a recent study conducted by Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt (2001), children ages 4-11 were examined in regards to bullying and its effects. The researchers used bibliotherapy to assist in helping the children overcome their difficult obstacle. Since bibliotherapy is considered an effective tool to use with children that are in stressful events, this concept study was conducted. To begin their exploration, the researchers defined bullying “as a specific type of aggression in which behavior is intended to harm” (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). In the study, bibliotherapy was used to help the children problem solve and understand situations around them. Using developmental bibliotherapy particularly by educators and librarians proved to be beneficial. The children showed a decrease in depressive symptoms, less anxiety, and even the parents improved in their parenting skills. Today, it is noted that 68% of therapists use bibliotherapy as a means to cope. Students that stutter, have dyslexia, or are coping with a mental illness tend to benefit from bibliotherapy. In general, the use of bibliotherapy with children who were being bullied was a success.

Bullying can be taken to an extreme level as violence and school shootings. Over the past decades, for example, child suicides and school shootings have become more alarming in

our communities. The average American school population is not exempt from the risk of dangers that go into keeping children safe anymore. The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut, when 20 children and 6 adults were shot, is just one example of the horrific dangers that can occur in schools. I know at my own children's schools and schools that I visit doing research there have been protective measures, such as security gates and the locking of the classroom door, that were placed into effect as to ward off any potential dangers. In addition to protective measures developed in schools, bibliotherapy can be a powerful tool to prevent escalating dangerous and/or harmful behaviors on school campuses.

### **Bibliotherapy and Death**

Drawings, bereavement support groups, and bibliotherapy are just a few of the concepts that can be used to assist children and adolescents with the trauma brought about due to the death of a loved one. Bibliotherapy reassures individuals that they are not alone and often answers questions that they may have (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). Morgan and Roberts concluded that through bibliotherapy, children who were traumatized by a death experienced decreased isolation when they realized that others shared their situations. The study results reported that cognitive ability, age, needs, and the situation all need to be considered when using bibliotherapy (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). Further, they established that bibliotherapy that did not match the developmental age and needs of the child would probably have no significant impact (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). However, they cautioned the researchers, there were certain cultural and religious backgrounds to consider when dealing with death regarding its appropriateness for a child or adolescent. It is important to consider that bibliotherapy may not be appropriate for every person or every situation (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). In this category of bibliotherapy dealing with a death is such a sensitive topic that it is very predictable that the participants would shy away from digging deep into the emotions that they are feeling. The

typical stages of grief include the stage of denial, which is likely to inhibit the process of bibliotherapy.

Morgan and Roberts (2010) discussed the issues and problems surrounding death when dealing with children and adolescents. They described the perceptions that children may have when someone they love dies. Heartache and self-guilt may be components of the grieving process. Pre-school children also experience grief, and because they do not yet understand the permanence of death, they may repeatedly ask if the person is coming back (Morgan & Roberts, 2010).

School-aged children between seven to eleven years old appreciate the permanence of death, but generally see it as removed from them. Children of this age may feel guilty when someone dies because they feel they should have done something to prevent the death (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). For adolescents, death can become an area of fascination or a concept that they romanticize due to their intriguing feelings that they will live forever. Teens may even wonder who would come to their funerals and what those people would feel at their funerals. However, just as younger children need help understanding their grief so do adolescents and many adults (Morgan & Roberts, 2010). Since death is a permanent situation, bibliotherapy may assist the individual in understanding that they are not the only person that suffers from the death of a loved one.

### **Bibliotherapy and Autism**

Using bibliotherapy with individuals who have autism spectrum disorders has been effective. Social stories, as Hanley-Hochdorfer (2010) portrays are popular among people with autism and those with Asperger's Syndrome. Although Hanley-Hochdorfer admitted there was little empirical data to support the use of bibliotherapy in this population, they noted that social stories reduced disruptive behavior. For example, four participants of varying ages with

different degrees of the disorder were targeted over a fifteen-minute observation period. Four times per week before lunch the bibliotherapy session was administered. Social stories as an intervention for autism and Asperger's Syndrome symptoms proved beneficial for the four participants. They were able to be much more focused and interested in their schoolwork (Hanley-Hochdorfer, 2010).

### **Bibliotherapy and Depression**

Liu (2009) examined depression among adults and used bibliotherapy to serve as a catalyst to resolving their problems. The participants were a group of people with depressive symptoms. Depression has been projected to be the second leading cause of disability by the year 2020 (Liu, 2009). Depression is considered a debilitating health problem that causes enormous social and economic burdens worldwide (Liu, 2009). There is a supposition that mental illness has a stigma and that it can be resolved through discipline, resolution, and perseverance.

Bibliotherapy, as stated by these scholars, has long been used as a therapeutic method and is thought to serve several functions, such as providing information and guidance, generating insight, and offering solutions to problems (Liu et al. 2009). Participants of the study were recruited through flyers in dormitories and cafeterias. Engaging in bibliotherapy lowered participants' depression levels. Although some of the participants had difficulty identifying with the main characters, overall the results were positive and supported the use of bibliotherapy.

There is a certain efficacy in the use of bibliotherapy. When dealing with depression Pardini, Scogin, Schriver, and Domino (2010) provided evidence that mental conditions, such as depression can improve when using bibliotherapy. These scholars suggest that one out of ten adults suffer from depression each year (Pardini et al., 2014). Furthermore, Macdonald, Vallance, and McGrath (2013) stated that bibliotherapy can be effective in the treatment of

mental health problems. In their study changes in mental health were measured using standard measures, and it was determined that there was a significant improvement when using bibliotherapeutic materials. The participants used self-guided or self-help books along with what these scholars recognize as prescription based reading (Macdonald, Vallance, & McGrath, 2013). Too much stress and anxiety seemed to be caused by the debilitating circumstances surrounding this population of people that were undergoing life-altering situations. The idea of using self-help books is basically suggested for those individuals with mild to moderate symptoms with 25% of people in the selected population having a mental health component to their situation not all individuals can benefit from just using self-help books (Macdonald, Vallance, & McGrath, 2013). One of the most compelling statements that came out of this research study was, “There is now sufficient evidence to allow the conclusion that bibliotherapy is a cost-effective treatment that encourages patient participation and encourages partnership working for statutory bodies” (Chamberlain, 2008, p. 34). There has been encouragement for librarians to invest in community-based programs that use bibliotherapy for this very reason. Macdonald, Vallance, & McGrath (2014) attest that there has been a paradigm shift where bibliotherapy can now be a community based program driven by librarians rather than driven by healthcare providers. The library setting has become more open to providing services for individuals in their community and bibliotherapy is one avenue to have participation in such programs.

When dealing with a select group of participants referred to as the “gifted population,” it is critical to offer differential support during times of loss. Due to their unique social and emotional needs, it is gifted children who, during times of sadness, may require specified support more than most. There are circumstances that precipitate such a problem. These include, but are not limited to: “the death of a loved one, disruption of familiar comfort and security, divorce, family financial difficulties, frequent moves, loss of a friendship, and loss of opportunities and

goals” (Heath, 2008). Children and adolescents who are gifted can also experience grief because of their global perspectives on issues such as war, famine, and persecution (Burke, 2009).

### **Bibliotherapy and the Gifted Child**

Many gifted children feel experiences more intensely than their peers (Gross, Rinn, & Jamieson, 2007). There is a tendency to suffer from depression during some of these experiences (Burke, 2009). With regard to gender, there is a bias in society based on the belief that males should not grieve and that asking for help may be seen as a weakness (Burke, 2009). Societal pressures influence how gifted boys and girls respond to grief intervention, and matching the needs of the differing genders may be a critical piece to offering valuable support (Burke, 2009). Gifted children come from various backgrounds and schools and counselors need to be sensitive to the diversity of individual grieving preferences (Burke, 2009). Typically, counselors tend to focus their attention on students who are failing academically, and gifted students often are overlooked until problems interfere with school work or inhibit social interactions (Hébert & Sergent, 2005). The essence of bibliotherapy is to utilize children’s books to aid in solving personal problems (Silverman, 2000). Gifted students possess advanced reading skills and have the ability to grasp issues; therefore, bibliotherapy is an excellent tool for them (Silverman, 2000).

### **Bibliotherapy in School Settings**

Educational settings are becoming more diverse, with students from varying cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, language differences, economic level, and with different learning disabilities present in schools. Bibliotherapy is one approach that holds great promise in helping educators and school librarians find ways to target individual learners (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). When using bibliotherapy, school personnel—including librarians and educators—systematically match reading materials to the unique needs of each learner to facilitate student



achievement and development. Bibliotherapy uses stories and narratives as an academic intervention in the classroom (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2000). As found in this research cognitive is interchanged for clinical. Clinical bibliotherapy most often takes place in a structured setting and is facilitated by a counselor, therapist, or psychologist to treat individuals experiencing serious emotional or behavioral problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Hébert and Furner (1997) posited that developmental bibliotherapy is most appropriate when undertaken in a school media center or classroom and should employ guided reading to facilitate an interaction between readers' personalities and literature. School personnel can use developmental bibliotherapy in several ways:

- 1) to identify the concerns of their students;
- 2) to prevent or address relevant social or emotional issues before problems arise;
- 3) to serve as a guide for future stages of childhood and adolescence by providing knowledge of what to expect and examples of how other young people have dealt with similar concerns (Hébert & Kent, 2000).

Literature can relate to individuals across the board and people with diverse backgrounds (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006). Bibliotherapy provides students with metaphors for life experiences that make it easier for those who were previously unable to verbalize their thoughts and feelings appropriately to learn new ways to cope with problems (Pardeck, 1993). Research indicates that there are benefits to using bibliotherapy. Researchers posited that bibliotherapy contributed to (a) less physical violence in the classroom, (b) less name calling, (c) fewer put downs, (d) improved conflict resolution strategies, (e) increased sensitivity to peers, and (f) an increased ability to listen to peers (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006).

Research was conducted in Israel in 2010 to study 79 children and adolescents (Betzalel, & Zipora, 2010) who were involved in bibliotherapeutic sessions. The participants were divided

into three equal groups. One group was tested in cognitive bibliotherapy, one group in developmental bibliotherapy as they termed, and the last was a control group. Some obvious limitations to the study might have affected the overall results. Primarily, the adolescent group was the control group; therefore, their anxiety, and the likelihood that they would stay in a troubled environment, did not improve and was not tested using bibliotherapy. However, the other two groups, the cognitive and developmental groups, significantly improved in their anxiety and ability to function positively.

The particular book used with the groups was Burns's *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*, (1999) a book often used with depressed clients. The book is often cited and recognized as a good self-help book even though it is fairly old. The authors of the study concluded that positive results were obtained using bibliotherapy. The results indicated that when using bibliotherapy anxiety decreased over time.

### **Summary**

The research literature on bibliotherapy is not abundant and there is a consensus about the lack of the empirical data on the topic. As a result, it is difficult to make generalized statements about all the benefits of bibliotherapy. However, the research literature reviewed suggests that bibliotherapy is a useful method to assist those overcoming traumatic obstacles.

First, it was important to trace the definition of trauma and its multiple facets. Trauma is a common element that is found among participants, but it is crucial to identify what kind of trauma is being experienced. By addressing this issue PTSD may be eliminated and this is the ultimate goal for those working with people going through a traumatic experience, as notated by the research literature. Researchers recognize that trauma can be difficult for a person to manage on their own. Therefore, bibliotherapy may serve positively to prevent anxiety, depression, or other health complications affecting person's ability to function in society.

The existing research examines diverse communities of people who have been studied with the purpose of using bibliotherapy in their environment. Bibliotherapy appears to have positive results when used with children who are living in the families going through divorce or separation, or experiencing alcoholism in the home. Positive effects of bibliotherapy have been seen with those who are being bullied, people who are dying or who have lost a loved one, those suffering from autism or Asperger's syndrome, depressed people, and those learning how to function under peer pressure in the school settings. The researchers used a combination of clinical and developmental resources of bibliotherapy to address particular needs of their participants. The results of the studies confirm healthy benefits of bibliotherapy.

As seen from the literature, there is a deficit of research on bibliotherapy because dealing with trauma is a sensitive topic for researchers and requires special preparation and IRB requirements, especially when studying children. A lot of the research in this literature review seems to be outdated. There were no recent research studies that focused around the topic of bibliotherapy. Even the recent publications used the data from old studies and suggested that the ways how to use bibliotherapy without conducting further research. That is why the intent of the present research is not only to add to the body of literature, but to explore in details the changes occurring in children participating in this study as a result of bibliotherapy.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This research was driven by the lack of studies on using bibliotherapy with children, young adults, and adults. This study aimed to identify and confirm the benefits of bibliotherapy as an effective tool for recovery of the children affected by traumatic life situations. There are numerous ways to practice bibliotherapy, and based on the findings of this study, librarians and school counselors as well as teachers may develop programs allowing them to interact with students in a manner that would utilize the viable opportunities that bibliotherapy offers. Clearly, bibliotherapy is being used; however it is often times not measured due to the sensitive nature of dealing with children who are coping with a trauma. As I stated in my opening paragraph in Chapter 1, employing bibliotherapy by reading to my student Eleanor, was a way to use a book to help her cope with her home life and the obstacle of abuse.

In this chapter, I discuss the research design, briefly review the theoretical framework, revisit the research questions, and introduce participants. Further, I describe the research procedures, data instruments, and explain data coding and analysis. In addition, I explore my role as a researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical issues. The chapter will conclude with limitations and possibilities of the study. The assessments that I used for this case study varied from a Motivation to Read Assessment (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996) to a Feelings Assessment to determining whether each student would give the selected book a thumbs up or thumbs down. Sometimes, they chose to give the book a thumbs middle, which is something they came up on their own which was very clever in informing me that they were not so happy with the selection.

## **Research Design: A Case Study Grounded in Transformational Lens**

The present research project is a qualitative case study. As Creswell broadly defined case study research, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (2014, p. 4). Data for this type of research is typically collected in the participants’ settings, and the researcher makes interpretations of the data through its analysis.

When looking at multiple case studies, according to Yin (2014), it is important to have “a preliminary plan, focus on a design, prepare the information, collect the data, analyze the data, and then, share the information acquired with professional journals or research groups” (p. 3). Furthermore, Yin stated, “Your goal is to design good case studies and to collect, present, and analyze data fairly” (2014, p. 3). Yin’s perspective is to not underestimate the extent of the challenge that is involved in undergoing a thorough multiple-case study.

The key element to multiple case studies is in understanding a social phenomenon that may need investigating. Four participants each form an individual case, then, each case is compared to one another resulting in a comparative case study of the use of bibliotherapy with four children as described by Merriam (2009) and Yin (2014). A comparative case design may have more than one unit of analysis rather than examining the case as a whole. The unit of analysis in this design was each child’s response to bibliotherapy in the context of experiencing a life after situation defined as trauma for the purposes of this study.

When projecting questions for the study, it was important for me to ask the "how" and "why" questions. “In summation, one must want to conduct a multiple case study in order to understand a real-world case and one must assume that the conditions surrounding the study will involve the success of the study” (Yin, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, Yin emphasizes the importance of removing bias in the study for successful results. In case study research, biases may be more

prevalent and need greater attention than in other types of research. Yin (2014) reminds her readers that a good case study is challenging and requires serious professional attention. For the purposes of this study, the participants were involved in one-to-one interactions with the researcher via book readings, interviews, and journal writings.

The theoretical framework used to investigate and interpret data was a transformative lens. Typically, a transformative lens focuses on marginalized groups of people that have been neglected by society. The participants in this study can be considered marginalized because of the sensitivity involved with the issues with which they are coping. For each participant they felt somehow different, even if from their previous selves, due to their experiences with a life altering situation, or trauma. Creswell (2014) contends that a transformative lens needs to be “intertwined with politics and a political agenda” (p. 26). Considering the participants’ personal situations, I believe in a political agenda to fight for the rights of young children that are vulnerable and have to deal with life obstacles without the assistance of professionals. Dealing with life altering experiences is difficult to overcome even for adults, not to mention young children. The purpose to change and the intent to take action are the main components of healthy recovery from challenging and painful situations (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 275). There is a consensus that the dynamic of functioning within a transformative lens will produce change in the workplace, in political settings, and institutions (Somekh & Leven, 2005, p. 275). Therefore, there is a value system placed on the need to look at the research through a transformative lens because the children going through a traumatic obstacle are, in a very real sense, marginalized. Moreover, recognition of these individuals takes a risk on the part of the researcher because of the sensitive nature of these topics.

Linking transformative lens to the methodology is essential because it ties the study together. Multiple case studies are an appropriate methodological approach to the study based

on the transformative lens. Using multiple cases allowed me as the researcher to carefully explore each participant's experience and then search for commonalities and differences across the cases. Rich qualitative data collected in the form of interviews, journal writings, and audio tapings enabled individual students to share their personal stories. Each student had a story to tell and although their "group" may be marginalized, when given a voice, they were able to share their emotions and feelings towards their situation. It is this "voice" that empowers the group to become less marginalized thus moving from a group labeled "subject to trauma" to a group walking to recovery.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This section will begin with the research plan study and the description of the participants. In the following subsections, I will detail setting, data collection instruments, coding, and analysis.

#### **Research Plan Study**

After the study's approval by the IRB (Appendix A) and my committee members, I began soliciting the participants through the help of Dr. Black, a licensed school counselor who offered assistance when I was experiencing difficulty in gaining entrée with participants. Further, I consulted the school counselors at campuses where participants were enrolled regarding the needs of the participants in order for book selections to be made. According to the IRB requirements, each parent had to be notified and signed the consent form for the child to participate in the study (Appendix B). The parents also had access to all the books selected for the study. This was essential to the overall success because the parent's approval solidified the connection with the need of the children to the content of the books. There were lists of book selections on each consent form for the parents and the parents had the opportunity to meet with the school counselor to review the books prior to meeting with their children. This experience

enabled me as researcher to move forward with each participant to begin gathering data for the case study.

Each week, I met with each participant. A typical session began with me as the researcher beginning each session with an ice-breaker. We would discuss the recent events that had taken place at home and school. Then I would allow the participants to select a book from the books that were approved through the IRB. The children would often have in mind which book they would want to read next from our previous session. The participants would read the sight word list to determine if they would be able to read the book on their own. Once the children were able to successfully read the sight word list I would encourage them to read the book to themselves. In the event that the words on the sight word list were too difficult, I would have the child read the book aloud to me encouraging them to overcome difficult words. As the children read, we would stop along the way and do what I call stop and chats to discuss what was going on in the story. Then I would allow the participants to journal their responses based on a discussion question prompt that would enable reflection to take place. Journaling was a part of the process at each session. The researcher kept observations notes throughout the study, documenting all the changes that occurred during sessions, as well as reflections about the interviews and the participants' behavior. This process often revealed the stages of bibliotherapy that was occurring while the children were reading and responding to the text. Then I would formulate a discussion on what was the overall message that they encountered by reading the book. Finally, I would allow the participants to illustrate their journey with the book. Many times the participants wanted to further discuss the book selection and they enjoyed looking at the books that would be possible selections for their next session.

All reading materials, books, and journals were provided by the researcher. I collected books from University library, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, and ordered some from online



services such as Amazon (See Appendix C for an annotated list of books). The information collected was sensitive in nature; therefore, I housed it in a locked filing cabinet in Building A on a college campus. No one except me had access to the data. Collecting data, I complied with the required levels of confidentiality and anonymity to protect the participants of the study.

Compensation for the participants was a twenty-dollar gift certificate to Barnes and Noble bookstore. This incentive was special because many of the children showed an interest in books they did not always enjoy the topics that we were reading so it gave them the opportunity to purchase books that were of the particular interest levels. All notebooks for journals were provided by me and housed in a locked cabinet at Building A on a college campus.

### **Participants**

Participants were purposely selected based on convenience and criteria sampling (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2007). Participants were from local private and public elementary schools and presented a diverse group of individuals. Three criteria were used to complete selection. It was essential for the study to include participants that are dealing with life-altering situations and need assistance in coping with these issues. The study excluded anyone who could possibly undergo abuse because the researcher is not a professional therapist with a license allowing to treat this kind of participant. The selection process considered whether or not the participants had transportation to their interview settings, and whether or not they were able to commit to the consecutive six weeks of sessions for their study. The sessions consisted of an initial interview and a Motivation to Read Assessment (Gambrell, Pallmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996).

There were four participants in the study. Alexander, age nine, Benjamin, age seven, Christian, age eight, and Ian, age seven. The four boys are White and came from financially stable families. While their age group placed them in elementary school, they did not attend the

same school; however, the structures of the schools were similar. Both schools strived for academic excellence. Their campuses were pristine, well-kept, and clean. The teachers were on task and created a student-centered environment for learning. Each teacher met with me and showed a significant concern for the children sharing that their overall disposition in class was effected by their particular dilemma. The school counselors had an invested interest in each student and met with them regularly. The counselors knew the families well and had open communication about the children's progress throughout the sessions.

Alexander is a young boy in a Catholic school, and his parents are going through a divorce. He walked in to our first session with a football logo cap on his head and a big bulky watch on his wrist. He looked tall and seemed strong. He shared that he enjoyed playing sports and spending time with his friends. Alexander smiled nicely, but it was not until later in the session when I saw that smile. It appeared like I had to gain his trust first. He often complained about our sessions interfering with his recess time. We only met once a week for a thirty-minute session for six weeks, so it did not interfere with his social play too much. However, Alexander made it clear to me that these sessions were something that his mother and school counselor felt he needed. He was reluctant to open up and showed little interest in the sessions. The bibliotherapy sessions were suggested to his mother, and she was eager to have him participate since he was showing so much anxiety about the upcoming divorce and moving to a new home. It was reported by the school counselor that Alexander often had anxiety about change in his life. His mom was in the process of moving into an apartment, and Alexander was displaying signs of stress with that looming change in his life.

Benjamin, age seven, is an avid reader in the second grade at a public school in a suburb of a larger city nearby. He has big blue eyes and long straggly blonde hair. His hair never seemed combed, and he often discussed his lack of sleep and being tired in the morning when we

would meet. Benjamin enjoys reading, and although journaling is not his favorite past time, he journals very well. Out of the four participants, Benjamin was dealing with the most devastating trauma. His dad died unexpectedly seven months ago. The cause of his father's death is still unknown to the school counselor. Regardless, the family—Benjamin, his mother, and his four year old little sister—are having a very difficult time dealing with their loss. The pain and resultant grief was so severe that Benjamin after four out of the six sessions decided that he did not want to participate anymore.

Christian and Ian are brothers, eleven months apart, and are both in the second grade. They are ages eight and seven respectively and going through a divorce at home. Christian, the older brother, is a very intelligent little boy who is able to read above his grade level according to his teacher. A well-mannered child, he appears to be taken care of by parents and his extended family. His grandmother seems to be important in his life; she often picks him up from school and watches him while his parents are at work. Christian uses his finger as a marker when reading. He reads fast and comprehends well. Christian likes school, but most of all he is a fan of the local sports university team. He goes to their games with his mom and her friend. He speaks fondly of his dad and enjoys spending time at his dad's house. He likes it the best because he can ride the bus and play with his old friends in the neighborhood. Christian and Ian seem very close to each other.

Ian is seven and is a very talkative little boy. Unlike his reserved brother Christian, the information from home was mostly communicated by Ian. He reports flat tires and the prayers that he shares with his mom in the morning before school. Ian loves his family, and wants things to be happy in his life. He is a little smaller than his brother Christian since he is younger. Just like his brother, he is a strong reader. Ian's teacher shared with me that Ian likes being the class helper. He was often found diligently working in the classroom prior to our sessions, sometimes

at his desk and sometimes at the computer center. Ian communicated well and appeared to enjoy our sessions throughout the study.

Incremental to the success of the study was the school counselors as participants. Their ability to shine a light on the life-altering events that were taking place in each child's life were important because this gave me as researcher the information necessary to not only gather appropriate materials; this information enabled me to tap into the problems presented by each child and provide significant discussion questions that assisted in generating the data.

Table 1. Presents Each Participant, Trauma, and Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Race	Economic Strata	Trauma
Alexander	9 years	White	Middle Income	Divorce
Benjamin	7 years	White	Middle Income	Father's Death
Christian	8 years	White	Middle Income	Divorce
Ian	7 years	White	Middle Income	Divorce

As it is evident from the table, the participants' age ranged from seven to nine years old. They were all White from the middle income families. They all went through traumatic experiences and this fact made them eligible to participate in the study.

### **Setting**

The setting of the study took place in two local elementary schools that could insure privacy. It was important for me as researcher to provide an inviting setting that was not threatening to the participants. For this case study, there were two different sites selected. The first school was a Catholic private school attended by my first participant. This school was located in a thriving community, and the children there were mostly privileged White students.

It was a large school consisting of about 1000 students, and the school counselor had to meet many needs of the students' population. She identified at least ten children that could have benefited from the program. One boy had just lost his mother to a suicide. Another little boy was bullied, and a little girl had difficulty making friends and was too bossy because she was dealing with the death of a grandparent. All of those children's parents were contacted, but none of them wanted to participate in the program.

The second setting that I visited was a school located in a more rural environment. It was a much smaller school having about four hundred students. This school was a K-5 school, and after speaking with the school counselor, it appeared that there were several looming issues of tragedy going on in the second grade classes. It was this population that I received my participants. The students were all avid readers, and the general population was White middle class individuals. Both of these schools had excellent counselors that worked with me to try to get their troubled children help.

Both schools had similar meeting rooms where I could conduct sessions with the participants. These were conference rooms that were situated near the main office. The rooms were fairly small with a conference table in the middle of the room. Chairs were positioned around the table, but during the sessions we sat next to each other creating a more intimate environment for discussions and sharing. The rooms had doors with windows providing lots of light. The participants liked the room and felt comfortable during the sessions. In the center of the tables I housed crayons and markers for journal drawing. At each session I displayed the selection of books so that the children would see the books that they had already read and the ones that they would be able to choose from.

## **Data Sources**

Various sources of data collection were used throughout the study. I have collected notes from bibliotherapy dialogues throughout the sessions, six individual interviews with each participant, journal entries, and my consistent observation notes. Individual interviews became the primary data source since they provided the most valuable information concerning participants' feelings and their struggles through life-altering experiences.

**Bibliotherapy Dialogues.** As the primary data source, bibliotherapy dialogs included informal interviews which were conducted during the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015. Each bibliotherapy dialog lasted approximately 30 minutes, and each participant had six sessions. I provided a selection of books for the participants, and they were able to choose the book that they wanted to read. Since the ages of the children ranged from around seven to nine years old, many picture books were used for the sessions. Each child-participant read six books throughout the six-week study process.

The bibliotherapy dialogs were semi-structured with questions that allowed for additional questions to emerge depending on the participant response. I provided a sight word list for the participants to read over at the beginning of each book reading. If the child was able to successfully read the words, then they read the book to themselves. If they experienced difficulty, then I read the book to them. For the most part, all books were read silently by the children, and I interrupted them for "stop and chats" along the way to see what they were comprehending and to probe how they were feeling about the story they read. I was able to make connections as to whether or not the participants were experiencing the stages of bibliotherapy during these bibliotherapy dialogs. Book annotations and discussion questions that were used during the sessions are found in Appendix F.

Each session was audio taped, which enabled me as researcher to determine the in depth responses from each child. Audio tapings were very important to the study because they gave a chronological progression of how the students managed their emotions through reading books and journaling about those books. As researcher, I transcribed those tapes and input them into a software program, Atlas TI that assisted me as I triangulated the data and found similarities and differences in the children's responses. The topics I was exploring through interviews were based on the four stages of bibliotherapy: identification, catharsis, insight, and universality and whether or not the children met these four criteria in the program.

**Journal Entries.** As a secondary source I used journal entries written by the participants. The participants were given notebook journals to respond to each reading. During the first session, a Feelings Assessment was conducted to determine the emotional stability of each participant. During the sessions after reading each book I provided writing prompts for the children to write something in their journal that related to the story that had been read. For example, for the book *Counting Blessings*, we discussed how they could count their blessings and we wrote down the blessings that were in their lives. Some other prompts were: The boy in the book would get anxious when he was waiting to see who would pick him up from school since his parents were divorced. Do you ever get anxious waiting to see who will pick you up? If so, tell me about what you would do to distract yourself?

**Researcher's Notebook.** Lastly, I maintained a researcher's notebook recording pertinent information, impressions, and observations from sessions with the four participants. This was significant specifically when I noticed a change in Benjamin's interaction with the books and stories we were reading. This participant dropped out after four sessions. His story will be discussed later in the dissertation. My notes served as a mechanism for me to record my

own thoughts about the process, reflect on the interviews and observations, and it was another data source to triangulate interview and written data products.

### **Data Collection Timeline**

The data for the study was collected from the children in the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015. I tried to avoid interference with other academic activities to which the participants were committed.

Table 2. Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection Method	Date Collected
Child Books Introductions	November, 2014
Child Number 1 interview	Late November, 2014
Child Number 2 interview	January, 2015
Child Number 3 interview	January, 2015
Child Number 4 interview	January, 2015
Child journal entries	November, 2014 to February, 2015
Child Audio Tapings	November, 2014 to January 2015
Observations	November, 2014 through February, 2015

### **Data Analysis**

After all the data was collected, I began transcribing interviews and coding. The results of coding allowed for the analysis and interpretation of the collected sources.

When exercised with due care, case study research participants provide a wealth of data. “Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg, 1991, p. 1). I used an Intrinsic approach to case study research (Stake, 2006). In the Intrinsic mode, the researcher has an invested interest in the case. By relying on experience



and literature surrounding the case study, I was able to analyze the data collection process. This methodology is precise in documenting the changes that occurred can be an effective tool to analyzing data even though it has been under scrutiny since the 1930's (Tellis, 1997). I heard a story on Sirius radio talking about a boy that was being bullied in his neighborhood. His father unknowing of this gave the boy a telescope for his birthday. When the father went into visit with the boy he said "Son you are looking through the wrong end of the telescope. The boy very sure of himself said , "NO, dad, you see, if I look at the bully down the street through this end, he seems to be a whole lot smaller than when I turn it around and look at it the proper way." This approach of looking through a telescope was much like the experience that I had when looking at the codes to my data. Depending on the angle that I used to view the data, the results tended to seem either larger or smaller than maybe expected or anticipated.

When I first began the data analysis, I reread all of the journal entries and reread the written documentations of the audio tapings. After, rereading this information I began to code data using Atlas.ti. The constant comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze all collected data. I coded each data source: interviews, journal entries, and researcher notebook entries, line-by-line, inductively, recording all words and phrases that indicate how bibliotherapy is assisting the participants in dealing with their trauma. While other codes were also used, I chose not to focus on codes that were not associated with bibliotherapy for analysis purposes. Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 presents all codes, the frequency at which these code occurred and their relationship to themes. I also examined words and phrases that were specifically associated with acceptance. My initial input of the data and coding were limited because of my inexperience. Once I began coding the journal entries my understanding of how recursive and overlapping the stages of bibliotherapy can occur really came into focus and increased. My understanding of bibliotherapy in my early years of researching the topic thought

that the four stages had to be sequential in order to reach universality. This is not the case at all and was evident in the coding of the data. There were times when only one or sometimes all four stages of bibliotherapy were taking place. This understanding of how children shift back and forth in the process greatly influenced my results, which will be discussed later in Chapter 4.

Since I did not have any *a priori* codes, I initiated with open coding. As an example, here is a sample of my process: I carefully read the first interview of Alexander, I coded by assigning codes to his words and phrases that felt important. After coding the first interview, there were 33 codes documented. I had to code the first set of all the interviews from each participant in order to review and refine my codes. An example of my coding follows: For the code of Trying to Escape, I coded the following words and phrases: “movie instead of being alone,” “trying to distract from sadness,” “trying to forget,” and “doing more enjoyable activities.” Then, I examined the different codes and collapsed all into the code *Trying to Escape* as being more descriptive of what was occurring. Once all sources were coded, I combined codes that are similar or had the same meaning and continued combining and collapsing codes until I reached the point of saturation.

The overarching themes to the study all fell under the umbrella of the four stages of bibliotherapy, which are identification, catharsis, insight, and universality. The 33 codes that pertained to bibliotherapy are noted in tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Just as the little boy viewing the bully from his bedroom window, I was able to look at this data adjusting the lens to answer my three research questions. My first impression of using bibliotherapy was that the participants would go through the stages of bibliotherapy in a sequential format. After conducting the research, I determined that the stages are recursive and that students can visit varying stages at varying times during the process.

Table 3: The Themes of Escaping Reality and Code Frequency

Codes	Frequency
Relates to the story	39
Trying to Escape	18
Relate to Character in a Book	4
Watching Happy Movies	2

Table 4: The Themes of Dealing with Conflict and Code Frequency

Codes	Frequency
What makes me Sad	19
Discouraged about book writing	8
What Makes Me Scared	5
Comprehension Difficulties	4
The “d” Word	4
Feels Bored Some of the Time	3
Gets Angry Some of the Time	3
Seems Anxious	2
Feels Bullied Some of the Time	1
Feels Lonely Some of the Time	1

Table 5: The Themes of Distress At Home and Code Frequency

Codes	Frequency
What Makes Me Angry	7
Behave Badly at Home	3
Problems Sleeping	2
Feels Sad	1

Table 6: The Themes of Understanding that He can Cope and Matched to Bibliotherapy Stages and Code Frequency

Codes	Frequency
Catharsis, Insight, & Universality	17
Identification & Catharsis	15
Identification	14
Catharsis	1

I chose to look at each participant as part of a marginalized group and, by doing so, I was able to carefully identify their points of need. After closely analyzing the data, I was able to draw some conclusions and limitations to the study, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. In the table below, each category includes the themes. There are no clear boundaries between the themes because they are interrelated; therefore, the same themes appear in different categories.

For example, *Escaping Reality* theme represents the identification category meaning that participants are able to understand and identify the problem or critical event in their life. When the same theme appears during catharsis, it means that the individuals' emotions are being invested in their painful experiences.

Table 7: The Themes of Being Happy or Counting Blessings and Code Frequency

Codes	Frequency
What Makes me Happy	33
Details About Home Life	26
Polite Response	19
Insight	13
Student Reaches Universality	8
The most important thing is to happy	4
Curious about other Book Selections	4
Happy Most of the Time	2
Counting Blessings	1
Relaxed and Talkative	1
Student Laughs	1

As previously stated, my first inclination was that the participants would be going through the stages of bibliotherapy sequentially. When I conducted the study the results proved differently. The children were visiting stages of bibliotherapy at a recursive state and sometimes visiting all four at the same time. This is the traditional method of how bibliotherapy works and it was proven in my study.

Table 8: Overarching Categories and Themes

Overarching Stages of Bibliotherapy	Identification	Catharsis	Insight	Universality
Themes	1. Escaping Reality 2. Dealing with Conflict	1. Escaping Reality 2. Distress at Home 3. Dealing with Conflict	1. Dealing with Conflict 2. Understanding that They Can Cope	1. Dealing with Conflict 2. Being Happy 3. Counting Blessings

Another component to note for the analysis stage of the study was my own interpretation of the data. My past experiences had to be isolated from the study, and I did so by attempting to keep all bias out of the study. The most important thing for me was to be able to communicate the findings objectively and without bias, therefore, I kept an open mind that it was possible for bibliotherapy to not assist the participants. This was not the case. Bibliotherapy did assist the participants and those results will be discussed in Chapter 5. Stake (1995) suggests that researchers involved in the analysis of data in order to develop case studies use two forms of analysis. He contends that most researchers use a blend of interpretive strategies and coding strategies, although individual researchers tend to favor one over the other.

### **Situating Myself as a Researcher**

I have seven years of teaching in the elementary grades experience that drives my interest in the age of the participants. My placement during student teaching was in the second grade, as well as my very first job as a teacher. Therefore, I felt very comfortable working with the three second graders. It also helped me with selecting books for that age level. My second job as a

teacher was teaching the third grade, thus I knew how to approach Alexander as a third grader. My professional experiences as a teacher placed me in a position where I was able to collaborate with the school counselors to select books that fit the needs of the students. Having classroom experience, I was able to notice that there were some students who seemed to be going through significant changes in their homes that needed special attention. I would often use books to read to them to help with their problems and obstacles. Once again, this made me wonder how effective books are when dealing with life-altering situations in a child's life.

My special interests in children's literature began when I was an undergraduate at one of the state's private universities, taking a children's literature class. I began to browse the school bookstore and started my very own collection of children's books. I began to look at books through a critical lens by analyzing the illustrations along with the text. This became a passion of mine and ultimately led me to pursue a Master's degree in reading education at a larger state university. Under the direction of Dr. Green, I learned the deeper meanings of assessment, the differences between a phonetic program and a holistic program, and the paradigm shifts that had occurred in reading education. As one of my curriculum requirements, I needed to take a course outside of my college. Dr. Green suggested a library science class. When I met Dr. Yellow and began taking her class, I knew I had found my niche. I loved the course so much that I continued taking almost every class offered in the library and information science program and became a library certified. When I began working on the Ph. with Dr. Magenta, I knew that my topic would revolve around children and books. After brainstorming with my advisor, Dr. Magenta, she introduced me to a new term that would become the driving force behind my dissertation. That term was bibliotherapy. I realized that I had been practicing bibliotherapy with my own children, with children that I had taught, and used it personally to overcome my life obstacles.

My professional life and my personal life as a mother, melded into the interests that truly drove this study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important element to the validity of the research that was conducted. Gaining the trust of a child that is going through a trauma is not an easy task. The school counselor or teacher can help build relationships with children, but it is the researcher's task to develop these relationships to make participants feel comfortable sharing their life-altering experiences that are often traumatic. As I learned more about each child, I was able to create a safe space for my participants.

Continued engagement with each participant (one academic semester), line-by-line coding of multiple interviews with the participants, and seeking significant feedback of my analysis and case write-ups from writing group colleagues are critical elements ensuring credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2006). Additionally, as I compared observation notes and journals, I triangulated the findings (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation of data was conducted with peers from my writing group to compare results found in the study. This is an important aspect of analyzing data because it brings in another person's professional opinion and eliminates bias to the interpretation of the study. The following discusses ethical issues and bias.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There is potential for bias in the study due to my own personal experiences. I have a background in reading education and library science and have used books successfully with my students. Additionally, with the death of my daughter, I used books as a means to help my own children overcome her death. This was a transforming experience for our family. I am also dealing with my mother being diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. My personal situation has



had me revisit the need for books to use with my children in helping them deal with the loss of a loved one. I do recognize that literature is subject to the individual and that there are possibilities for the absence of obvious changes after a program of using books to assist in a trauma. There are ethical issues or bias in the research study due to the population being surveyed. Children being the primary participants make it essential for the research to remain confidential in regards to location of the data collection and to the names of the children. Children dealing with a specific traumatic obstacle need anonymity based on their ability to open up and share feelings that surround the incident that they are describing. There is an inherent bias because as researcher I have a professional connection to books by being a reading specialist and certified librarian. This bias, however, also qualifies me to conduct bibliotherapy because of my experiences with using books with young children. These children are not just my own three Claire, Maggie, and Connor, but it also includes children that I have taught and worked with as a librarian for seven years. I have bias towards the research in another way too. As mentioned in the section my personal connection to the research I used bibliotherapy personally when my daughter died of SIDS and when my mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor. For these reasons, I acknowledge my bias but have attempted to distance these experiences and factors from the study in order to look at the results through a neutral lens that will add to the academic literature existing in the field.

### **Limitations and Possibilities**

One apparent limitation to the study is that not all potential participants are inveterate readers. For some children, picture books and reading to the child may be the most effective method to use bibliotherapy. Additionally, determining appropriate and effective reading levels was a challenge because the participants were children. Also, the level of interest the participant may or may not have in the selected book may interfere with the ability to attain an accurate

interpretation of the data. Commitment to a thirty- to forty-five minute session for six weeks will be a necessity for the participant.

Other possible limitations to the study include the sensitivity of the subject at hand. Whether or not outside counseling and social workers, as previously stated, will be involved in a team effort, was determined when the participants were interviewed at their first session. It may be necessary for the researcher to receive information from outside individuals to help the participant deal with the subject matter as the sessions unfolded.

There is also a limitation to the study based on the data that all four participants are boys. This curtails the information gathered and makes me wonder if in society we are still putting pressures on boys to withdraw when they are emotional about something in particular. The question to be pondered is whether boys in general have a harder time coping with a trauma than little girls. An interesting replication of the study looking at girls would add to the academic body of knowledge that was collected in the study. Whether or not girls are even willing or even necessary participants is an issue to be discovered. Possibilities to conduct research on bibliotherapy and children are not limited to the population that was gathered for this study. The four participants were based in a southern state and they were located between a twenty mile distance from each other. Furthermore, the similarities in their academic environments limit the study because there was little economic, racial, or financial diversity among the four participants.

### **Revisiting Study Purpose and Questions**

The main purpose of this study is to examine how literature can be a powerful tool for overcoming life-altering events and circumstances. An overarching question that frames this study is: How can bibliotherapy be an assistive method of helping an individual deal with the trauma of either a life-altering event or coming to terms with marginalization? Three specific questions are presented:

- 1) Does literature impact a child going through a significant trauma, and if yes, how?
- 2) What are the changes in the child's feelings, if any, when using bibliotherapy?
- 3) What are the commonalities and differences among the four different children going through traumatic life experience and using bibliotherapy?

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

After conducting this multiple case study, there were several points of interests that suggest further discussion. Looking at each participant case and then searching for similarities and differences among the four cases seems to be the most thorough means to interpret the data. When I first embarked on researching bibliotherapy, my perception of the process was that individuals had to sequentially go through stages in order to reach the goal of universality. After speaking with professionals and conducting the study, I realized that it is possible for more than one stage to be obtained at a given period of time depending on the individual. It is natural for a participant to be going through the stage of identification and at the same time to be experiencing catharsis. This movement between stages reflects the stages of Piaget's stages of development (Piaget, 1973) and how one stage can overlap another. Much to my amazement the responses to the literature seemed to be similar among the participants. What was interesting was that the participants seemed to all be going through turmoil over their life-altering situation. They each hoped for happiness, and, as I begin to discuss them in this chapter, you will see that young boys dealing with traumatic obstacles have similar emotions that draw them to considering activities to escape and opportunities for hope. When we think about emotions and the range of which we may experience things in life, it is helpful to imagine that at any given time we may feel anger, hurt, sadness, or even joy all at the same time. In this respect, it is plausible to understand that the stages of bibliotherapy may be experienced in conjunction with and among each other in a recursive and overlapping manner.

Below I am presenting each case using original quotes from the participants. Because the participants are elementary school students their, responses are often short and incomplete, but they reflect their true feelings and emotions. When I notice some extreme emotions in the responses, I use all capital letters to emphasize the intense feelings that were expressed by the

participants. Additionally, the following information breaks down the codes, gives definitions of the codes, and shows the frequency for each child.

Table 9. Code and Code Frequency for Alexander

Code	Code Frequency
Relating to a Story	12
Trying to Escape	6
Relate to Characters in a Book	1
Watching Happy Movies	2
What makes me Sad	4
Discouraged about Book Writing	2
What Makes Me Scared	0
Comprehension Difficulties	4
The “d” Word	2
Feels Bored Some of the Time	1
Gets Angry Some of the Time	3
Seems Anxious	0
Feels Bullied Some of the Time	1
Feels Lonely Some of the Time	0
What Makes Me Angry	2
Behave Badly at Home	1
Problems Sleeping	0
Feels Sad	0
Catharsis, Insight, & Universality	3

Identification & Catharsis	4
Identification	3
Catharsis	0
What Makes me Happy	6
Details About Home Life	5
Polite Response	6
Insight	3
Student Reaches Universality	2
The most important thing is to happy	1
Curious about other Book Selections	1
Happy Most of the Time	0
Counting Blessings	0
Relaxed and Talkative	0
Student Laughs	1

Table 10. Code and Code Frequency For Benjamin

Code	Code Frequency
Relating to a Story	9
Trying to Escape	5
Relate to Characters in a Book	0
Watching Happy Movies	0
What makes me Sad	10

Discouraged about Book Writing	3
What Makes Me Scared	2
Comprehension Difficulties	0
The “d” Word	0
Feels Bored Some of the Time	0
Gets Angry Some of the Time	0
Seems Anxious	2
Feels Bullied Some of the Time	0
Feels Lonely Some of the Time	1
What Makes Me Angry	0
Behave Badly at Home	0
Problems Sleeping	1
Feels Sad	1
Catharsis, Insight, & Universality	6
Identification & Catharsis	2
Identification	1
Catharsis	8
What Makes me Happy	6
Details About Home Life	4
Polite Response	3
Insight	1
Student Reaches Universality	1
The most important thing is to happy	1

Curious about other Book Selections	0
Happy Most of the Time	0
Counting Blessings	0
Relaxed and Talkative	0
Student Laughs	0

Table 11. Code and Code Frequency For Christian

Code	Code Frequency
Relating to a Story	8
Trying to Escape	3
Relate to Characters in a Book	1
Watching Happy Movies	0
What makes me Sad	3
Discouraged about Book Writing	2
What Makes Me Scared	1
Comprehension Difficulties	0
The “d” Word	1
Feels Bored Some of the Time	2
Gets Angry Some of the Time	0
Seems Anxious	0
Feels Bullied Some of the Time	0
Feels Lonely Some of the Time	0
What Makes Me Angry	3



Behave Badly at Home	1
Problems Sleeping	0
Feels Sad	0
Catharsis, Insight, & Universality	5
Identification & Catharsis	3
Identification	4
Catharsis	0
What Makes me Happy	8
Details About Home Life	7
Polite Response	5
Insight	3
Student Reaches Universality	2
The most important thing is to happy	1
Curious about other Book Selections	1
Happy Most of the Time	1
Counting Blessings	0
Relaxed and Talkative	1
Student Laughs	0

Table 12. Code and Code Frequency For Ian

Code	Code Frequency
Relating to a Story	10

Trying to Escape	4
Relate to Characters in a Book	0
Watching Happy Movies	0
What makes me Sad	2
Discouraged about Book Writing	1
What Makes Me Scared	2
Comprehension Difficulties	0
The “d” Word	1
Feels Bored Some of the Time	0
Gets Angry Some of the Time	0
Seems Anxious	0
Feels Bullied Some of the Time	0
Feels Lonely Some of the Time	0
What Makes Me Angry	2
Behave Badly at Home	1
Problems Sleeping	1
Feels Sad	0
Catharsis, Insight, & Universality	3
Identification & Catharsis	6
Identification	2
Catharsis	0
What Makes me Happy	11
Details About Home Life	9

Polite Response	4
Insight	4
Student Reaches Universality	3
The most important thing is to happy	1
Curious about other Book Selections	1
Happy Most of the Time	1
Counting Blessings	1
Relaxed and Talkative	0
Student Laughs	0

### **Case 1: Overwhelming Stress and Anxiety in Alexander's Life**

#### **Alexander's Situation**

Alexander is a third grader who is nine years old attending a large private school in the area. Alexander used to live in a happy home with his mom and dad in a beautiful neighborhood where he had lots of friends to play with and interact. Alexander enjoyed riding the bus home with his friends and then having them come over to his house after school to play all sorts of ball games. He enjoyed basketball, football, and baseball. The security that he had before his parents divorced was reassuring to his self-image and his overall sense of self.

Unfortunately for Alexander, things started to change. He noticed his parents were fighting more often, and he was overhearing conversations with a scary word "divorce." Currently his parents are going through a divorce and his mom has to move to a new home. All these events affect Alexander and his ability to function at school and home. He does not have the security of a family unit anymore, and these changes that are occurring in his life have caused

him to have a range of emotions including anxiety, anger, sadness, and even aggression. His school counselor has been following Alexander's home life for some time and seemed very concerned about his behavior. He was recommended to me to work with using bibliotherapy to help him cope with his life-altering situations.

After conducting the research and coding the data for Alexander, I was able to apply each overarching theme to coordinate with Alexander's circumstances: identification, catharsis, insight, and universality. The stages of bibliotherapy were recursive and intertwined as Alexander visited all the stages, but at times he would combine the stages. This was not a sequential, linear process.

### **Escaping Reality**

To begin, Alexander went through the stage of identification and during this time he tended to *Escape Reality*. *Escaping Reality* for Alexander often resulted in defensiveness. After reading the first book titled, *The Boy Who Didn't Want to Be Sad*, I asked Alexander if the book was helpful in his situation, and he responded warily, "No, I don't think so." Every time we had to select a book, the defensiveness was obvious, and Alexander continued to remain reluctant to participate even though I had gained his trust. Later on throughout the sessions, I asked Alexander if he was enjoying the books that we were reading. He once again responded defensively and said, "No, because all we read about is DIVORCE, DIVORCE, DIVORCE!" Finally, when we read the book *Dinosaurs Divorce*, he admitted that he "liked the characters," and rushed to add, "but I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!" Bibliotherapy was not assistive to Alexander. His statement indicated to me that Alexander still struggled to accept his own personal home trauma. To him, it seemed like if he does not admit it then maybe it would go away.

Some other ways that Alexander showed signs of *Escaping Reality* were that he liked to draw. He enjoyed drawing in his school and during our reading sessions. The things he liked to draw are situations that depicted when he was having a fun time with his friends and especially his dad. Alexander often drew at home; so he shared with me when he got sad he would go into his room and draw with his favorite set of markers.

Another outlet for *escaping reality* for Alexander is watching “happy movies,” as he refers to it. One of his favorite movies that he likes to watch over and over again is *The Night in the Museum*. He likes the movie because it has a lot of fantasy and humor, which help him to laugh and forget about his troubles and pain at home. Sometimes he draws the characters from the movies and special moments that make him happy. One of his drawings is attached in the Appendices section (Appendix G). In the drawing he situates himself as the viewer of the movie *The Night at the Museum*. The illustration is a picture of what his bedroom looks like when he is watching “happy movies.”

The happiest time for Alexander is when he is surrounded by his friends. He has two friends whose families are also going through a divorce and these three little boys escape by doing silly things together. Alexander said, “We like to play with the hose and throw water balloons at each other.” I asked Alexander if they as a group talk about their divorce situations, and he said, “No, we pretend it is not happening.” He and his friends also play with his family dog and participate in sports activities outside. Alexander shared that when they are together life seems happy, and he does not think about his mom and dad going through a divorce.

It is evident that *Escaping Reality* maybe an initial stage of dealing with a traumatic experience. It is inevitable because the first thing that Alexander tended to do is to avoid talking about things that hurt and detach himself from the situation. An instance of this was his tendency to repeatedly watch a movie that was humorous and to participate in activities that were

to some degree, representative of “normalcy” or that represented events that were routine and familiar. *Escaping Reality* can occur through the identification stage, the catharsis stage, and even at times during the stage of insight. Alexander may not admit that he has a problem and avoid talking about it, but he realizes there is a problem and turns on his defense mechanism.

### **Distress at Home**

*Distress at home* was also evident among the four participants. During our six-week sessions I found that the children slowly began to trust me more to share things that were troubling them at home. It was clear that the dynamics of circumstances that were occurring in each of their lives weighed heavy on their minds. Some examples of *Distress At Home* with Alexander included his observations of the fighting that was taking place in the home. Additionally, Alexander’s dad had moved onto another woman in his life, and this forced him to have to deal with a possible stepmom. This distressed Alexander because as stated prior that he wants his mom and dad to get back together. Alexander expressed confusion regarding where he would spend the Christmas holidays, and this also caused anxiety. When asked are you looking forward to being out of school for two weeks, Alexander stated, “No, I don’t know where I will be I think I am going to Florida with my dad and his girlfriend but if we do I won’t get any of my presents until we get home because we already tried and they won’t fit in the car.” This concerned Alexander that he would have to wait until he and his dad and his dad’s new girlfriend would return home before he received special things that he wanted for Christmas. Alexander was also stressed regarding leaving his mom for the holiday. His concern for her wellbeing was evident when he asked, “What will my mom do while we are gone?” This looming trip to meet the dad’s girlfriend’s family seemed overwhelming for Alexander because he would be meeting a lot of new people, and he worried whether or not this family would accept him. He wanted to get along with the family but his anxiety about being so far from home concerned him.

Another example of *Distress at Home* for Alexander concerns his mother's position to move from their home where there are memories of security to a small apartment. Alexander's mom is trying to provide the best she can for her son, but the financial burden of maintaining such a large home with just the two of them was not practical. Therefore, the school counselor expressed to me that Alexander's mom was extremely concerned and had seen a change in his behavior regarding the upcoming move. Alexander was somewhat of a homebody and this change of where he would live made him feel anxious because he would not have the stability of playing with his neighborhood friends. When asked how he felt about the move the child said, "I'll probably be bored all the time, alone, and just go in my room to watch movies." Once again we are reminded how intensely Alexander *Escapes Reality* by watching "happy movies."

The last area in Alexander's life where he associated with *Distress at Home* was how he missed his favorite, pet dog when he is at his dad's house. The family pet was purchased as a Christmas present for Alexander when he was a young child. The parents were trying to get Alexander to focus on something positive since there was so much turmoil going on at home. As a result, Alexander became overly attached to this pet dog and found comfort being with the animal when there was disharmony in the home. Alexander shared, "I don't know what I would do if something happened to my dog, Jasper." He was also concerned about his dog being in a small apartment with no yard to play in and exercise. Alexander said, "How in the world are we going to do things with Jasper if he cannot go outside in the yard to fetch a ball." All these issues indicated signs of *Distress At Home* for Alexander, and his defensiveness revealed resistance to accepting the situation. As a result, he struggled throughout the sessions.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

*Dealing with Conflict* and looking at how Alexander handled his life-altering situation was difficult because children the age of him sometimes do not have the coping skills to

successfully manage their range of emotions. In Alexander's case, his traumatic experience was so hurtful that his behavior changed at home and school. Learning to face conflict may seem easy for some people, however, for Alexander this life change was nothing but a negative experience. When asked what will make you happy? Alexander responded, "If my mom and dad get back together." So, the conflict that was experienced between the mom and dad trickled down to the child and now Alexander had a very difficult time dealing with his conflict. After reading the book *The Berenstein Bears Moving Day*, Alexander wrote in his journal that maybe when he moves he will find a new life. He has an unrealistic expectation regarding the move saying, "Maybe I will live in a big field with lots of trees." This was not the world that was being created for Alexander – his dream of living in a huge field would be replaced by a small apartment with concrete parking lots. The main goal for Alexander when *Dealing With Conflict* is a hope that he can one day be happy again. Although not pronounced, reading *The Berenstein Bears Moving Day* allowed an opportunity for Alexander to refocus his thoughts. In a subtle way, we *Escaped Reality* through the book. Happiness is the most important thing for Alexander and he cannot navigate through all the changes to place himself in a happy state of being because what he really wants in life will probably never happen. His mom and dad getting back together is not a realistic goal for Alexander to focus on.

### **Understanding that He Can Cope**

After reading book selections, Alexander began to develop methods to cope with his traumatic situation. He began to look at his life through a positive lens and said, "Maybe when we move I will make new friends." He also stated, "Everybody moves it is just part of life." The book the *Berenstein Bears Moving Day* was the book that we read which precipitated the response from Alexander. Thus, it was evident that reading the book selections had a somewhat



positive impact on Alexander. He went through the stages of identification and catharsis simultaneously which helped him to emotionally relate to the characters in the books.

### **Being Happy and “Counting Blessings”**

The desire of *Being Happy* and the ability for Alexander to *Count Blessings* was seen when he reached the stage of universality. His defense mechanism to be happy was often displayed through his ability to escape his reality. When asked what do you like about your life? Alexander, responded, “I like my mom, my dad, my dog, and my big sister, Shannon.” Therefore, Alexander knew how to count his blessings and find ways to be happy but his overwhelming sadness about his parents’ divorce was evident. His anger toward the situation makes it difficult for him to not act out in school and at home. As most children of a divorced family, Alexander had an idealistic perspective of what he wants his life to look like. He found joy in his friends but most of all wants to be happy. *Counting Blessings* for Alexander was not easy but he managed to do so since his parents are so concerned about his well-being.

### **Case 2: Devastating Feelings of Loss for Benjamin**

#### **Benjamin’s Situation**

Benjamin is a seven-year old little, blue eyed blonde hair boy who was grieving the death of his father. It has been seven months since Benjamin’s dad passed away, and he was having a very difficult time coping with the loss. His dad died over the summer of 2014 so when Benjamin returned to school to begin the second grade he was filled with despair and devastation. He cries uncontrollably in class and rarely gets his class work completed due to the out bursts of tears as documented by his teacher. The school counselor has been meeting with Benjamin but to no avail; he is not making progress. At this time, Benjamin’s mother and little sister are still in denial regarding the death of the father. Benjamin mentioned to me that since his father died his mother died her blonde hair purple. His little sister still thinks her dad is

coming home soon, and Benjamin's mother has signs of denial through her conversations with the school counselor as reported by the counselor. According to the counselor, the family needs professional counseling but is just not ready to do so. The school counselor mentioned this to me after speaking with Benjamin's mother. Benjamin was recommended to me to work with using bibliotherapy to begin to peel back the layers of hurt that have developed in his life. Although the sessions were supposed to last for six weeks at the four week mark Benjamin expressed to his mother that he did not like reading about death and dying and he wanted to stop participating in the research program. Therefore, the data collected for Benjamin is limited. Benjamin's ability to reach the stages of identification, catharsis, insight, and universality were special because of the intensity of his emotions. Most evident with Benjamin was his ability to access all the stages during each book reading. There is something to be said about the acuteness of his emotions and how he was able to demonstrate a connection with the four stages of bibliotherapy.

### **Escaping Reality**

When a little boy like Benjamin is only seven years old and is faced with the death of his father, *Escaping Reality* is something that is not easy to do. The constant reminder of the loss brings back a flood of emotions for Benjamin. It is through his crying and emotional outbursts that he momentarily confronts his pain and in the outbursts he *Escapes Reality*. After reading the first book *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*, he identified with the main character Freddie and he said, "I think Freddie is mysterious." This was an interesting connection between a leaf that was dying and Benjamin's perception that there is something mystical about dying. He communicated that there seems to be a sense of mystery behind having a dad living here on earth one day and then gone the next. Benjamin stated, "This book reminds me that all things die, and I hope I don't die." Therefore, Benjamin's ability to *Escape Reality* through this first stage of bibliotherapy, the identification stage, seems appropriate. The book *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*

also talked about having relationships with people who are dying. Benjamin said, “I remember the things I used to do with my dad and I miss him.” This categorized the catharsis that Benjamin was going through while he was at the same time showing signs of insight and identification and universality.

Other ways that Benjamin *Escaped Reality* was apparent through his stories he shared about how funny he thinks his little sister is. He told me that the little girl, Isabel, eats ketchup with everything even with her macaroni and cheese. The little antidotes about Isabel seemed to get Benjamin’s mind off of his loss and helped him focus on a relationship that was still in his life. This seemed important to Benjamin as he loves his sister very much and sharing stories about how she wears her swimsuit around the house year round and likes to even bath in it brought a big smile to Benjamin’s face. Isabel is a safe haven for Benjamin. She is young and vibrant and Benjamin has hopes for her. He often spoke of her expressing that he really loves her. It was apparent that together these two children will learn how to survive their father’s death. The bond that they have is very strong and even though there is a three year age difference, Benjamin seems to foster a sense of hope for Isabel.

The last component of how Benjamin *Escapes Reality* is his outdoor play at home and school. He mentioned that he really loved recess time because he was able to play basketball with all the other second grade boys. This time during his day is a huge distraction from the emotional tugging that is going on with this little boy. Although, he seems to cry at recess sometimes as reported by his teacher, Benjamin still finds a way to escape these strong emotions by playing outdoor sports. His mind is off of his dad for a brief moment, and he is able to play ball with the boys. Just the simple fact that Benjamin decided to end the sessions shows that he is *Escaping Reality* and will probably do so until he goes through all the stages of grief.

Benjamin’s lack of wanting to participate in the program leads me to believe that he is not only

*Escaping Reality* but he is in huge denial that this is happening to him. He cannot come to grips with the fact that he will never see his dad again.

### **Distress at Home**

Benjamin's home life seems as though the mother is very absent from his daily life. During the six-week sessions that we meet, she was out of town most of the time and Benjamin did not even know where she was or what she was doing. He stayed at his aunt's house, and he mentioned on several occasions that he had a hard time getting rest when he slept there. Benjamin indicated that he had been sleeping on the couch, watching television throughout the night and early morning. The unknowing of where his mother really was upset Benjamin, and he often stated, "I hope my mother is Okay." From our conversations I did not find that Benjamin was emotionally attached to any one family member except his little sister. She is his pride and joy, and I think the fantasy that she lives in by thinking that her father will be coming home is one that Benjamin shares. He cannot although he is older and smart enough to know that he will never see his dad again.

In the book *I Miss You* the story goes through the real life circumstances concerning death including what a funeral and burial look like. The book talks about how in the movies bad people tend to die but in real life good people die too. Benjamin retorted, "This book makes me feel sad." He also stated, "I do not want to talk about it." As he made this statement he began to tear up, and he started crying. The stages of identification, catharsis, and insight were all met during this session. The *Distress at Home* that Benjamin had with the uncertainty of where his mother was increased his feelings of deep sorrow. The book showed details of a burial and Benjamin said, "I remember what that looks like." He was in a sense reliving the death of his dad and seeing those images caused him to relive his own life-altering trauma.

Another issue regarding *Distress at Home* was that Benjamin stated that his aunt and uncle fight a lot. So, not only was he estranged from his mother, he was in a family that has a lot of disharmony. This can be very unsettling for Benjamin as he wants to be happy but has all these forces that are coming against his ability to be happy. It was my impression that until things settle down and become more stable at home, Benjamin will continue to battle the turmoil of the loss of his dad due to additional stressors and situations that appear unstable to him. This was apparent when Benjamin retorted, “When my mom gets home everything will be better.” The boy longed for some stability in his life, and he believed he and his sister Isabel would have that when his mom returned home. Benjamin further reinforced this belief as he stated that when his mom is at home they enjoy eating dinner together and going to the movies which appeared as normal kids of activities to him. It was apparent that Benjamin felt he would be more stable when his mother returned home.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

One of the issues of conflict that Benjamin experiences was knowing that even though his dad is dead that he still loves him. The last book that we read together was titled *The Invisible String*. In this story the children learn that even though someone is not in their presence they still have a love connection. Benjamin wrote in his journal, “I have an invisible string with my mom, my paw paw, my nana, and my dad, and my uncle.” Benjamin told me that “even though my dad died he still loves me.” This idea of having his father’s love even though he is not here anymore was a huge issue for Benjamin. This issue was evident when we read the book *The Invisible String* because Benjamin tended to ponder with whom he had an invisible string. His feelings of despair were obvious when he read the main characters had fears too. Through reading the book he was able to realize that other people have fears and that the stage of universality was reached during this time. Benjamin seemed to recognize that other little

children have problems and require the extension of their emotions to rectify their emotions when dealing with difficult situations because of his interaction with this book.

One other area of conflict for Benjamin was his performance in school. He has been unable to keep up with his daily lessons and doing his homework is a problem because of the additional upheavals he has been at his aunt's house and there is less parental supervision there than when he seems to be with his mother. Benjamin wants to do well in school but his crying spells interfere with his ability to perform. His teacher noted that he has been unable to verbalize to her what he is feeling and why he is crying. It was only through our one-on-one sessions that Benjamin was finally able to open up and verbalize his anxiety and sorrow. This idea of facing his emotions was too scary for Benjamin, and he was pushed to an uncomfortable level which made him want to stop the program. With the assent form clearly explained to Benjamin at the beginning of the sessions he understood that participating was his choice. We stopped the sessions when he made the request to do so. Therefore, it appeared that dealing with conflict is an area of Benjamin's life, which he tries to avoid or is not ready or willing to address. He manages his feelings through crying and this behavior has become an ongoing problem for his teachers and the school counselor who conveyed they wanted him to manage his feelings in a healthy manner. Progress was made during our short four sessions because it was the first time that Benjamin was able to speak of his father's death his interaction with a book appeared to be the catalyst that allowed him to be able to speak about death. This may be the beginning of the healing process for the little boy.

### **Understanding that He Can Cope**

Benjamin lacked the ability to grasp the *Understanding That He Can Cope*. His world has been turned upside down and in his little mind, there was no solution to his eminent problems. Benjamin's traumatic experience is devastating because of the finality of the loss. He

in some way has to be able to come to terms with his reality. Additionally, his coping strategy is crying fits are not pushing him to a happy place. His crying is an external emotion that is expressing his extreme sadness. Unfortunately, at the age of seven many children do not know how to navigate such strong emotions at least not Benjamin.

When Benjamin gives details about his home life he says things such as, “I just wish my dad was still here.” This little boy is still struggling with his reality and although his mother, teacher, school counselor, and me as researcher all reached out to the boy he was not ready to move beyond the devastation of losing his dad. It appeared to me that it was as if he is just hearing for the first time that his dad has died although months have passed. Benjamin shared that he likes to read some of the time and prefers not to journal. This may be one way that he *Understands That He Can Cope*. He enjoys playing with friends and his television watching at late and early hours of the day are simple mechanisms where he is coping. Turning on the television and tuning out his reality is a way for Benjamin to cope with his emotions and not cry. For now, the television is his “counselor” and the fictitious characters he watches make him feel part of a world where bad things never happen and the good always prevails. Books such as *I Miss You* and *The Invisible String* in particular really made Benjamin think about the problem he is facing. Bibliotherapy on a whole was effective for Benjamin because he was able to go through identification and catharsis at the same time. His feelings were validated through the use of books and this gives credence to the implementation of bibliotherapy in this study.

### **Being Happy and “Counting Blessings”**

The only time I saw Benjamin show signs of *Being Happy* was when he spoke of his little four-year old sister, Isabel. He seems to be clinging to her during this difficult time especially since his mother has been traveling so much. We never got to read the book *Counting Blessings*. The quick cancellation of Benjamin’s participation in the research case study prevented us from

reading some selections that potentially would have been helpful for him. He was able to reach all stages of bibliotherapy because after reading the book *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* he stated, “I understand that everybody will die.” Thus, he did have a general understanding that he was not the only one that will go through a death or loss. However, the extreme pain that this child felt was so intense that he is not happy with life and the hand that he has been dealt. As I mentioned earlier in this document, I lost a child and this experience was devastating for me. It took me years to come to a place of acceptance and peace. As an adult I had resources that pushed me to my happy place. For Benjamin, a young child, he was feeling all these emotions and although he had resources, the death of his father was still too fresh and new for him to do anything else but cry. This has become his new existence, coping by crying.

### **Case 3: The Shy and Insecure Christian**

#### **Christian’s Situation**

Christian’s situation is interesting because he worked with me along with his little brother Ian who will be discussed in the next case study. Christian is a quiet little boy and he leans on his little brother for support. Christian is eight years old and his family is going through an acrimonious divorce. His mother has moved out of their family home into an apartment with another person. Christian seemed shy and reserved and often relies on prompts from me as researcher to begin conversations. He was an excellent student and it seems that despite all the distress going on at home he is coping well at school. His teacher reported that he is able to complete classwork but seems distracted at times. He was often late to school and his transportation to and from school is often decided just minutes before he is supposed to be at school. This stress concerns Christian because he liked to be on time and wanted to be at school for the daily announcements when students are recognized for good behavior and birthdays. The



most important thing for Christian is *Being Happy* and the following is a description of how Christian responded to each overarching theme found in the case study.

### **Escaping Reality**

*Escaping Reality* is something that Christian did when he is playing with his friends at his dad's house. He seemed to find security when he is at this home because it is where the family was a connected unit. Christian said, "All I want to do is play football with my friends when I am sad." Thus, finding strength in the relationships of others in a familiar environment is something Christian finds easy to do. These outdoor sports games are a way for Christian to get his mind off of the intense arguments that he has reported to hearing during the exchange between his mom and dad. He reported that he liked to pray together as a family and these prayers often include gestures for his mom and dad to get back together.

Another method that is used to *Escape Reality* for Christian is playing his Xbox at his dad's house. He and his brother like to play this game together and they are able to get into a pretend world playing Madden football games. Christian supported this observation when he said, "When we start playing Madden we totally forget about everything." Playing video games is a way to *Escape Reality* and Christian does so often. He mentioned that sometimes he played the game early in the morning before school and even when he gets home from school. He said he is looking forward to the summer when he can play the game all the time.

Christian also mentioned that when he was at his dad's house he is able to play games on his dad's iPad. He said that he and his brother fight over who will get time on the iPad but his dad makes them take turns. He enjoyed playing these electronic games and it seemed to soothe his anxiety by the statement, "When my mom and dad fight I play on my dad's iPad."

Attending the local university sports team's games was another way Christian *Escapes Reality*. He and his brother dress up for different teams and they each cheer for the opposite

team to see who will win. Christian wistfully talked about spring nights with nachos, hot dogs, and popcorn. These are all that a little boy could hope for in an evening. He stated, “We have fun with my mom and her boyfriend.” Spending time together as a family was what Christian most enjoyed and whether he is doing something with his dad or his mom and her new boyfriend he seemed to find a sense of security. This security helped him to stay grounded and be connected with reality that his mom and dad will not get back together and that he can create new happy memories.

### **Distress at Home**

*Distress at Home* is evident with Christian. Christian has strong grandparents and he leans on them for strength and security when things at home seem to be unraveling. He was troubled by his parents fighting, but when we read the book *The D Word*, he recognized that he did not cause it and he has to cope with it. After reading the book, Christian said, “I know I did not cause the divorce but it’s still hard.” This was a telling statement. In other words, Christian reached identification, insight, and catharsis through this book but dealing with the emotions were not easy. Bibliotherapy and the use of books to engage Christian assisted in his feelings of *Distress at Home*. We often discussed a lot about what it means to cope through the use of the book *The D Word*, and Christian was able to grasp the understanding of what it really means to cope with a particular life-altering situation.

The most apparent sign of *Distress At Home* is the little boy’s living conditions. He finds a lot of security when he is at his dad’s house and even said, “I do not understand why my mom just cannot live at my dad’s house again it would be so much easier.” What he does not realize is that his mother has moved on to another relationship, and this new mom’s “friend,” as Christian as refers to him, may be a potential stepfather for the boy.

The transition of living with his mom in an apartment has taken a toll on Christian. He complains about not getting enough sleep. He also expressed that the apartment is further from school than his dad's house so they have to get up a lot earlier. The new schedule that Christian is being forced to abide by has disrupted his life. There are no simple transitions when it comes to going through a divorce and Christian has had a difficult time navigating his emotions and what it means to be a child in a divorced home.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

Christian's ability to *Deal with Conflict* was obvious when we read the book *Divorce and Separation*, because he liked the content of the book. Christian said, "I really like the pictures in this book and the characters are funny. I think it is cute that the little sister cries all the time. I cry sometimes when my dad leaves me." The book is about divorce and Christian was able to reach the stage of universality by reading it; he indicated this by saying, "My parents fight too and they are divorced and they fight." Christian was able to recognize that he was not the only one going through a particular situation called divorce and he identified with the book. By reading the book Christian seemed to understand that other people are also going through a divorce life altering experience. Christian also experienced identification, catharsis, and insight all at the same time.

Dealing with conflict was also evident as Christian tried to get along with his little brother, Ian. They are so close in age, only months apart, that they seemed to run into competition battles between which parent likes whom best. Christian expressed that as he said, "I don't know if my mom or dad likes me or my brother better. Sometimes, I act better but sometimes I don't." Thus, finding his place in the family is an area of conflict for Christian.

## **Understanding that He Can Cope**

Christian experienced *Understanding That He Can Cope*. He has a good understanding that the divorce was not his fault and his mom and dad still love him. When we read the book *The Boy Who Didn't Want to be Sad*, Christian stated, "One thing that make me happy is going to sleep and one thing that makes me mad is when my parents fight!" Thus, Christian identified with the book and offered his views on it. It seemed he applied the concepts of the book to his life. He appeared to cope by sleeping which means when his brain is at rest (and he is not thinking about the divorce), he finds comfort. This tells me that the topic of the divorce probably consumes a lot of Christian's thought process. He tended to bite his fingernails, which is a nervous habit and he also sighed a lot during our sessions. He coped through his problems escaping to sleep and finding peace at night when there is no more bickering.

## **Being Happy and "Counting Blessings"**

*Being Happy* is the most important thing for Christian. Christian said that he can *Count His Blessings* by helping people. This indicates an empathy that the boy has towards others that may be going through a traumatic experience. Christian enjoyed many things in his life he just does not like the fact that his parents are getting a divorce. When reading the book *Counting Blessings*, Christian found pleasure in the beautiful illustrations that show the little boy enjoying his mint chocolate chip ice-cream.

When Christian was asked to *Count His Blessings*, he spoke of all the good things that his parents do for him. He gave examples of going to baseball games and eating mint chocolate chip ice cream. He said the one thing that he did want was a dog that he could play with and love on. *Counting Blessings* for Christian was easy and he was able to see that he could be happy despite his parents' divorce.

## **Case 4: The Pain of a Talkative Little Ian**

### **Ian's Situation**

Ian's situation is the story of a second grader who is seven years old and in the second grade. He is known to me as the "little reporter." Unlike his shy brother, Ian reports all the daily and current news from home. He shares stories such as having flat tires. Ian is small in stature and has big blue eyes. He often felt rushed to get to school in the morning as he did not know who will be driving him to and from school each day. There seemed to be no set schedule. This uncertainty confused Ian and he desired a more concrete schedule for his family. Ian was seeking for closure in his parent's divorce because he often said, "I just wish it would all be over." When Ian met with me he was very eager and open to conversation. He seemed like he was just waiting to tell his side of the story to someone. I was his captive audience and whatever he felt like talking about, he just let it all out. We often spent several minutes at the beginning and end of the session with Ian just filling me in on what was going on at home and school. He loved his teacher and was often found in the computer center when I would go to get him from his classroom.

### **Escaping Reality**

*Escaping Reality* was something that Ian did to deal with his life-altering situation. He responded that he had a tendency to go in his room and lock the door to be all alone. He spoke of how when he is home he gets sad and sometimes his mother makes him popcorn to make him feel better. Ian *Escapes Reality* by attending local university sports games. He was able to get away from the chaos of his families troubles by eating popcorn, nachos, and hot dogs something he conveyed that he really enjoyed and which appeared to absorb him. These university games seemed to be a regular part of Ian's life and he thrived at them. He liked to dress up like one of the teams that is playing and cheer for them. He often had a contest with his brother to see

which one of their teams will win as they cheer for opposing teams. Ian thought this is a funny thing to do and it served the purpose to get his mind off of the divorce and the fighting that he hears from his mom and dad.

Another way Ian *Escapes Reality* is by playing his Xbox. He and his brother play Madden football and he liked to win. He said that he plays the game so much that he gets tired from using the remote control. The source of using video games to escape has been a common occurrence in the home and Ian explained that when he is playing with the game he forgets about everything. One comment was telling as he stated, "I get to be in a pretend world." This is what makes Ian feel special when he plays with his brother on the video games.

### **Distress at Home**

The most obvious point to note regarding stress at home is the inability Ian has to know the facts about where he will be each day. The schedule was not consistent or predictable, and Ian expressed he has difficulty not knowing whose house he will be going to. When reading the book *Otis at the Window*, Ian was able to relate to Otis because he never knows who will pick him up or when and this scares him. This was a prime example of how bibliotherapy, in this case, reading and discussing a book with a theme in which he identified, was helpful in dealing with his life-altering event. He related that one day his mom and dad both showed up and got into a huge argument over who was taking the boys home. Ian said he just sat there on the curb and cried. It appeared that by reading the book, he was able to share this event with me.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

*Dealing with Conflict* is something with which Ian struggled. The book, *Oliver in the Window*, is about a little boy wondering who will pick him up from school and I purposefully selected it knowing of Ian's worry about the uncertainty of his circumstance. After reading, Ian said, "I wonder who will pick me up and it makes me scared." I asked Ian what he does when he

gets scared he said, “I just close my eyes and pray that my mom or dad will show up.” In this instance, he to recognized he was not alone in his fear, and that he had a strategy (prayer) that assisted him. In reading about a similar situation, Ian was able to express his feelings about his fear.

Another way Ian *Deals with Conflict* is by journaling. He mentioned that he enjoyed journaling and especially likes to write in the computer center at school in his classroom. He says that when something is bothering him his teacher told him to write it down and see if he can find a solution to the problem. We engaged in type of work during our sessions. Ian was able to write about the books we read and he often shared stories from home. After reading the book, *A Terrible Thing Happened*, Ian replied “Can I write my terrible thing?” I assured him that he could and stressed to him that he was in a safe environment. He told about a dream that he once had that his dad died. He mentioned it was a horrible nightmare and when he woke up he was sweating all over the place. He stated that to help him get over the dream he wanted to write it in his journal and we did. In this instance, Ian was able to read a book and through the reading and ability to respond through discussion, he had an outlet for *Dealing With Conflict*.

### **Understanding that He Can Cope**

*Understanding That He Can Cope* was clear when Ian displayed his ability to read the selected books and was able to apply them to his life. In particular when we read the book *The “d” Word*, Ian discovered that he was able to cope with problems that were going on in his own life. He liked the Gram character because it reminded him of his own grandparents and how much they helped him. Ian said, “I call my Gram Mimi and she always makes me the best food to eat. She helps me when I have to wait for my parents to come pick me up by doing my homework with me.”

Ian was a very talkative little boy and reported a flat tire that he and his mom and brother had. He gave a descriptive explanation of how it happened and what they did. He reported that his mom was talking on her cellphone and hit a curb. It was an accident but it upset Ian because he said they had to cross a dangerous road to get to safety. He then went on to describe how this flat tire affected them getting to school on time. When it was all over, Ian was able to cope by communicating well.

Overall, it appeared that bibliotherapy assisted Ian more than other case participants. He appeared to relate to stories selected on a personal level and to gain a perspective of his situations because of reading the books.

### **Being Happy and “Counting Blessings”**

*Being Happy* and *Counting Blessings*, was something that Ian was able to do when he escaped to attend sports, university games. When we read the book *Counting Blessings*, Ian said, “I like to count my blessings!” Ian easily spoke about eating ice cream and playing with his big brother and going to the park as blessings. He was able to directly apply a concept from the book to his life in a positive way. He even mentioned that he enjoyed going to Mardi Gras parades with his mom and dad when they were still married. Memories of going to the parades were happy times for Ian, and he seemed just a little sad thinking about those memories like they would no longer exist. Ian liked to do things socially so spending time with his family and friends made him feel special. This indicates to me that Ian had the ability to pull on past experiences that were good and not just focus on the negative divorce that has occurred.

### **Summary of Case Studies**

All four cases were unique in that each child brought a different personality, background, and demeanor to the table. The overarching themes of bibliotherapy identification, catharsis, insight, and universality were concurrent throughout the study. The participants each reached



these landmarks through the use of selected books in conjunction with self-developed coping skills. Although some of the participants seemed to be more uplifting, after the book readings the overall success of the program was apparent when the researcher reflected on the journals, interviews, and coded data. Bibliotherapy was effective in this study, to varying degrees, and it is an effective tool to use with children that are overcoming a life-altering trauma.

Each participant transitioned through experiences that included the themes which were *Escaping Reality*, *Distress At Home*, *Dealing with Conflict*, *Understanding That He Can Cope*, and *Being Happy and Counting Blessings*. The details of each of these themes were described and each participant's life-altering experience was presented.

There were similarities among the participants and these were found in the themes previously listed. There were also differences in the participants. The personality of each child definitely drove the process of the progress of the research. For Alexander and Benjamin, they had more negative outlooks on life and the shared hope to be happy. This disposition made it harder, more resistant, for them to cope with the book readings. Whereas, with Christian and Ian, they seemed to connect with each book reading and had a happier, more positive outlook on their future. There were similar responses to the books, and this led me to believe that the selections were appropriate for not only their age but for their circumstances. Bibliotherapy can be used successfully with children to help them cope with life-altering situations such as in this study. The willingness of the participants was a driving force behind the ability to conduct the study. Additionally, it seemed as though there is some reluctance on the part of the parents to have their children be part of such a program possibly because they do not want the information from home being communicated to the school.

In summation, I was grateful that each little boy had the courage to open up to me with their life-altering experiences and that in small ways bibliotherapy was assistive. Dealing with

events, such as divorce and a death in the family, is not easy even for all the children. However, those little boys did their best to communicate and collaborate with me while moving through the stages of bibliotherapy. Hopefully, their ability to accept their realities and cope with emotional trauma will strengthen as they grow. The study was just an initial step on the long road to recovery for each participant.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **Does literature impact a child going through a significant trauma, and if yes, how?**

The traumas that were analyzed for this case study specifically revolved around divorce and the death of a parent, situations that caused anxiety, distress, and resulting behaviors in all four participants. For the purposes of this study, trauma was defined as deriving from a Greek word, meaning wound (Gordan, 2007). Significant to the study was the concept that the emotional stability of the children was threatened through a trauma or life-altering experience. The children in this study appeared to benefit from bibliotherapy to differing degrees because by using books, it allowed some of these four children to: 1) experience emotions in a low risk environment, 2) identify with characters, and 3) come to an understanding that they (the participants) are not alone in experiencing a particular circumstance. Reaching this stage of universality in bibliotherapy was key to acknowledging the issues being experienced at hand and *Understanding How To Cope* through a situation. It is important to note that the use of bibliotherapy was distinct for each participant and successful in varying degrees. The data that was discussed in Chapter 3 surrounded themes that support the use of bibliotherapy. *Escaping Reality*, *Distress At Home*, *Dealing With Conflict*, *Understanding That He Can Cope*, and *Being Happy* or *Counting Blessings* were all overarching themes found in the data collection. The boys each experienced these themes while undergoing bibliotherapy. For example when the children were trying to *Escape Realty* this code occurred 18 times, for *Distress At Home* what makes me sad the code was revealed 19 times, for *Dealing With Conflict* what makes me angry appeared 7 times, *Understanding That He Can Cope* was present in the stages of catharsis, insight, and universality 17 times, and *Being Happy* or *Counting Blessings* was seen 33 times.

The previously listed codes were the high frequency codes. On the low end of the emersion of each category for trying to escape the children were noted two times for watching

happy movies, for *Distress At Home* they were noted to feel bullied or lonely some of the time only 1 time, *Dealing With Conflict* projected the code feels sad once, *Understanding That He Can Cope* proved the use of catharsis by itself only one time, and *Being Happy* and *Counting Blessings* the students were noted as laughing only one time.

When Alexander realized that other people move and that it is a normal progression of some individuals lives, he was able to relate to the characters in the books. This was a huge step towards Alexander reaching the stage of universality. For Benjamin, his understanding that all people die, even good people, connected the books to his personal life. Christian's understanding of how to cope made it possible for him to recognize that he was not responsible for the divorce. Ian was able to count his blessings when he spoke about his love of mint chocolate chip ice cream like the boy in the book *The Boy Who Didn't Want to be Sad*.

Additionally, Benjamin felt compassion when he was able to recognize the characters in the book *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* because he was now aware that everybody dies. He was able to move from a point of isolation to a community of people that have gone through loss.

For the two brothers, Christian and Ian they seemed to be in perfect tandem in learning how to cope with their new home life possibly because they had each other through their experience. These two boys were stable even though their surroundings were unstable. It showed some maturity on their part and by sharing the books they were able to open up to their problems. These examples of the boys' personal connections to the books support the use of bibliotherapy with children. The recursive presence of each stage of bibliotherapy made it possible for the children to experience various emotions at different times. Bibliotherapy is recursive in nature and all stages of may be visited at various times.

1) Children do not have to feel alone when they are going through life-altering circumstances; however, they often do feel alone. School counselors, teachers, and librarians

can be avid participants in using bibliotherapy to assist children in overcoming their trauma. Using literature as a medium is an excellent tool to draw out problems and formulate resolutions. The study proved this to be true by, success – at varying levels - in using books with the children. The children were able to experience stages of bibliotherapy by reading and sharing with me as researcher. For other children who experience other traumas or life-altering experiences, bibliotherapy would also be a helpful tool. As discussed in Chapter 2 in the literature review in the study, some other traumas that may be experienced by children include bullying or being a child with autism as well as the particular situations revealed through this study.

The children in this case study moved from different stages of bibliotherapy at various given times. For many circumstances, I saw the boys collaborate with stages of identification, catharsis, insight, and universality. This was a common occurrence. Their acute feelings often led them to regress to a previous stage. The hurt that they were feeling seemed to rise up in the stage of catharsis. Bibliotherapy does, in fact, have the ability to impact a child experiencing a significant trauma because of the changes that were noted in Chapter 4. As an example, when Christian and Ian were *Counting Blessings*, they understood that you can cope through literature and they understood that they could deal with a problem. As another, when Alexander was faced with having to move to a new home, he started to think of ways that he would be happy in his new home. He looked for the good in the situation and determined that in this new home he may find new friends to play games with and watch movies together. The children were grateful for things in their lives and were able to *Count Blessings*, with the exception of Benjamin. Even though Benjamin did not complete the study, his ability to reach all stages of bibliotherapy was noted.

To reiterate, the stage of identification is when the child identifies with the characters in a given book; the stage of catharsis is when there is an emotional connection to a book; insight is obtained when the child makes connections to the book. Lastly, universality is when the child recognizes that he or she is not the only one that goes through a particular circumstance.

Benjamin met all of these stages and when he was trying to *Escape Reality*, having *Distress At Home*, *Dealing with Conflict*, *Understanding That He Could Cope*, and *Being Happy* or *Counting Blessings* he showed significant growth in these areas even though he stopped participating in the case study. Since the children were all very young, their responses were often short and somewhat to the point. They did not seem to elaborate on issues. For this reason, discussions prompts were used to help guide the journal writing pieces and the descriptions of what they read. Some of the vocabulary in the books had to be explained to the children for example the use of the word “cope” was a difficult concept for the boys to grasp. We substituted words like *relate* or feel the *same as*.

Understanding how a child can be impacted by bibliotherapy is not an easy task to determine. Each child was so individual and had his own particular set of coping skills. Therefore, to understand how they are coping and how they are impacted, it took time to spend with each one of them on a one on one basis. By doing so, researchers like myself and other educators can determine if the stages of bibliotherapy are being experienced at all. In the cases included in for this research project all the stages were visited in a recursive manner. This recursive behavior made it interesting because the children were actually living through their problems. Understanding their emotions and showing compassion for where they were at any given time was key to the progression of the study.

As mentioned previously, bibliotherapy should not be used casually. How the child reacts to the study is instrumental on the progress that the child makes during the study. Thus,

children undergo changes and these changes push them to a higher level emotionally when using bibliotherapy. Literature is an effective tool when working with young children and following the progress of a child is important to the overall understanding of how they benefit from bibliotherapy.

When I examined the results of the study, I found that not only did the literature help the children deal with their problems it helped them move to a more stable, emotional state. This is an interesting fact because the participants were able to negotiate their emotions when reading and responding to journal entries to have a positive impact even though they were resistant at times. When Alexander said, "I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!" his emotions were being tested, and his ability to communicate his feelings with me were apparent. It was times like these that I noted the intense and acute emotions that were present with these little boys. Drawing out the emotions and dealing with them was one situation, however since I am not a licensed therapist, I remained in close contact with the school counselors communicating changes that were taking place so that each child would be given the necessary attention that they needed. It was the very use of books that prompted responses, indicating that bibliotherapy can be assistive in educational settings.

Books can be used to help propel children to a better place emotionally. The very commitment of these boys to complete the study, with the exception of Benjamin, made it possible to note the changes that occurred through the study. Alexander had a strong aversion to reading books about divorce. He tended to *Escape Reality* by trying to talk about things that were going on in his daily life. When Alexander did open up he showed emotions that were acute in nature and seemed to overwhelm the boy. He wanted to be happy, but he also wanted his parents to get back together. Benjamin found comfort when reading books about people dying, however, he was unable to completely let go of the sorrow that he felt to participate to

completion. Christian seemed to have a close connection with his grandmother and their relationship tended to carry the pressure of the divorce. Ian was constantly reporting details of home life and shared that he tends to go in his room and cry when he feels like his mom and dad are not getting along.

In conclusion to question number one, had I not selected appropriate books that met each child's needs as determined by their unique circumstance the study would not have been as successful. Matching needs to books is something that takes a special skill and by doing research on each topic, I was able to meet the needs of each boy. There were times when I wanted to bring in fun books to read however with the strict rules following the IRB requirements all books had to be approved by the parents prior to meeting with the boys. Therefore, we were limited and I had to do a very good job with these selections prior to getting consent forms signed.

### **What are the changes in the child's feelings, if any, when using bibliotherapy?**

The changes that occurred through bibliotherapy were noted when the boys discussed their details that revolved around their stress at home and *Escaping Reality*, as prompted by reading, discussion, and journaling activities. The way that their feelings appeared to shift so abruptly at times was evident in their responses to the books that we read. These feelings, though sometimes hidden, were ever present when we began to journal and discuss the books. An example is when Benjamin began to cry when we read the book *I Miss You*. His emotions of seeing a funeral take place brought back the emotions that he was feeling when at his own dad's funeral. This was too much for him to negotiate. The changes that occurred were found when the children expressed their individual concerns about the safety of their parents and the wellbeing of their homes. The children were noted to be happy, angry, sad, and frustrated at any given time during the sessions. When we read books regarding their life-altering situations, I



was able to recognize changes. These changes were due to the content of the literature that was selected. For instance, when Christian changed from being a shy little boy to someone that wanted to share information about his home life, I was able to see that he was connecting with me on an emotional level through reading and discussing the book. This book *The Terrible Thing That Happened* helped Christian to discover that others have terrible things that happen in their lives. Therefore, Christian was visiting all of the stages of bibliotherapy and he was *Understanding How He Could Cope*. The child was excited about the book selection and he gave me a thumbs up for the book. He liked that there are things that are out of our control and that this little raccoon in the book was able to get help from people at school to get through his problems. He related to the character and said, "That teacher is kind of like you and me."

When Ian found comfort in telling me about the flat tire that he and his mom had together, I could tell that he felt safe and that his story meant something. The book we read that day was *The Terrible Thing That Happened* and Ian was able to share the terrible thing that happened to him with me. His tone in his voice changed to concern as he described the flat tire and being stranded, waiting for a friend to come and change the tire.

When Alexander shared his upcoming travels to Florida with me, I could tell that he had gained my trust. The story *The Boy That Didn't Want to be Sad* was significant on this day because Alexander was able to think about the blessings in his life just like the main character.

Lastly, when Benjamin shared stories about his little sister, I could tell that he liked my company and wanted to talk about happy thoughts. All of these occurrences made it plausible for change to take place not only for the children but for me as researcher as well. I was able to modify my literary prompts to meet the needs of each child as they began to change in their disposition to the study. When we read the book *The Giving Tree*, Benjamin was touched at how giving the tree was. Even though the tree died the boy had the memories of all that the tree had

given him. Benjamin said, “I have memories of my dad.” I could tell that from reading the book Benjamin reached all stages of bibliotherapy and he was *Understanding How He Could Cope*.

Change is not always any easy thing to embrace, and without the guidance of an adult sometimes change can become wearily known as the unknown. However, the change that took place with these children seemed to evolve from the beginning of the sessions to the end of the sessions through the use of carefully selected literature and interaction with me as researcher. This evolution was based on gained trust that the boys found in me as researcher but specifically through the use of bibliotherapy as a tool. Because I stressed their participation was voluntary, they knew they could stop the sessions at any given time and this gave them a sense of autonomy. Additionally, by discussing the changes that were going on at home the children were able to let go of some of the pressures that they had carrying around all that information. They were not judged for their stories and sharing a little at a time coupled with the book selections helped them to change. Change is part of the main tenants of bibliotherapy. The recursive changes that take place through the interaction with books made it possible for the children to have a positive experience with bibliotherapy.

A child’s feelings are often hard to measure, however by reading books and sharing the information regarding the results of each reading, the children were able to express their feelings. Through verbal communication and reading of journal entries the researcher’s notebook was filled with descriptions of these feelings. For Alexander and Benjamin they were quick to show their emotions with me. Their problems seemed acute in nature. For Christian and Ian they seemed a little more settled in their life-altering trauma and their emotions were more reserved with me. My impression of each child changed as their feelings changed throughout the study. Like most educators, I was drawn to each student and had deep empathy for the evolution of change that was taking place during the study. Easily noted was the change of feelings. Because

the literature was so compelling, it often evoked emotions that possibly would not ordinarily be expressed.

**What are the commonalities and differences among the four different children going through traumatic life experience and using bibliotherapy?**

For Alexander, it was a rocky road to experience the classic stages of bibliotherapy. For Benjamin on the other hand, he was able to meet the stage of catharsis fairly easily because his emotions were so heightened due to the recent loss of his father. Christian and Ian, seemed to share commonalities regarding their life experiences, which probably had something to do with the fact that they were brothers only eleven months apart. Some commonalities among the boys were that they were all going through a recent life-altering situation that caused them to have acute emotions regarding their lives. The participants were not always able to communicate what they were feeling at first. However after reading books together, they all opened up to the subject at hand. A prime instance of this was Benjamin who was dutifully noted when his ability to share his life experiences from his home situation. Alexander was quick to share that he would be moving and that he was not happy about that decision. Some differences among the participants were their varying ability to share summaries of the stories. In many cases the children in this study would have very different explanations of the same text. For example, when we all read the book *The Terrible Thing That Happened*, each participant had a different interpretation about the bad thing that had happened to the raccoon in the book. I found this interesting because the textual component of the study was so heavily weighted in the analysis of the responses that were generated from the children. Other differences that were noted were that the children all experienced different stages of bibliotherapy at various times. No one child reacted the same to the text it was their own experiences that drove the emotions behind how they managed to negotiate what was going on in the story and following our discussions and

journal writings. The similarities that occurred seemed to revolve around each child's ability to take their own home life and place it in the situation in the book that we were reading or to closely identify with what was happening in the book. The participants were all willing to participate on some level and often shared stories from home that had something to do with the books that we were reading. For example, when we read the book *The Boy Who Didn't Want to be Sad* the participants all related to the main character. They enjoyed seeing how the boy in the book dealt with his anger and all the things that made him happy. The children talked about what made them happy. Christian and Ian both said, "I like chocolate chip mint ice cream too!" In conclusion to question three, I found the children overall because of the fact that their age was pretty much the same to respond in similar fashions regarding the general experiences with using books to assist in dealing with a life-altering trauma. They shared more similarities than differences and this may be because of the demographic similarities of their lives and the similarities of their life-altering trauma.

### **Summary**

All three questions were a driving force for the framing of this research case study. Understanding how literature impacted each child, how changes occurred, and the commonalities and differences were important to understanding each child's progression throughout the study. The most rewarding part of being researcher in this case study was seeing the children respond positively to the book selections. Although they were hesitant to read some of the books on a whole the boys progressed by being a part of the study. The concept of having bibliotherapy as a recursive process assisted in the ongoing progression of the manner in which the children were able to proceed throughout the case study. Each child was able to read a book, express his opinion, and journal regarding the given opinion. This process not only evolved into sessions that enabled me to get to know the boys; it was a procedure that helped me to provide book

selections that were appropriate for each child based on their unique situations. An interesting fact was that the two brothers Christian and Ian selected the same books with the exception of one incident. This made me realize how closely knit their family was and how the boys seem to think the same and make the same choices.

Each overarching theme was found in the children's repertoires. *Escaping Reality* became a means for the boys to undergo a series of behaviors that helped them to disconnect from their personal life-altering event. This was mentioned in the literature review when people go through a trauma they often times disassociate themselves with the situation. *Distress at Home* was evident when discussing the boys' daily schedules and the most common thread was that their parents were not coping well with the situations that were in front of them. For Alexander, Christian, and Ian it seemed like the parental disharmony between the two parents was a problem for the children. For Benjamin, it appeared that there was a strain on the family due to the death of their dad and Benjamin's mom's husband. *Dealing with Conflict* was a way for the boys to attempt to cope however, they often seemed unable to grasp the necessary skills that it would take to move them forward in their life-altering event. *Understanding that they Can Cope* was important and as the data revealed the main stages of bibliotherapy were met during this schema. *Being Happy* and Counting Blessings was the most rewarding to observe and the children all expect Benjamin were able to find some kind of hope in their lives.

### **Future Studies**

Because there were only little boys in the project, it would be interesting to replicate the study with girls of the same age. Also, another avenue for possible research is to look at teens going through a life-altering experience or trauma and see if they would even be willing to open up to such a study and what possible results would be generated. This type of study would be interesting to conduct and even to look at older adults going through change in their lives. With

respect to the limitations, only four boys were studied and this could be a deterrent in the authenticity of the study. It is possible that having a larger population may yield different results. The concept that the children in the study were all White, boys, from a middle income class also generates the idea that there are some limitations to how the results may be interpreted.

### **Implications for Further Research**

When making recommendations, it is particularly important to note in the beginning that the four participants were all boys from ages seven to nine. There were other opportunities for girls to participate in the research case study; however, their parents declined the invitation to have their child part of the study.

Bibliotherapeutic programs would benefit young boys and girls in their traumatic experiences and should be used more profusely. A replicated study of working with only girls around the same age would be interesting to conduct and then compare the findings. The difficult thing about this type of study is it is very hard to find participants and have both parents and child and possibly school personnel that to agree to the process. It took me over four months to gather all of my participants and in the end one of them, Benjamin, decided to cease the program.

Other recommendations are regarding Alexander, Christian, and Ian. Divorce is so prevalent in US society today. Parents that are experiencing such a drastic change should consider their child's emotions and seek out the assistance of school professionals. In these three boys' case – each experiencing parents' divorce – the parents were looking for an answer that would help them reconnect with their child. It is my sincere hope that by reading books about their divorce they were able to learn how to cope in small ways with it and learn that they are not the only one's going through this type of life-altering situation.

For adults, books such as *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*, (1999) have given individuals hope when they are dealing with life-altering events. Resources such as this book are prevalent in literary circles and generally school counselors and librarians have a collection that pertains to topics mentioned. Having the appropriate resources along with matching participants up with an experienced and effective bibliotherapist is critical to the success of the participant. Therefore, having a team of people to assist in the process such as a school counselor is important to bringing people to a place of universality and knowing that they are not the only one's going through their obstacle or trauma.

### **Conclusions**

Some conclusions to draw upon are that literature and bibliotherapy do assist children going through a life-altering situation. Simply put, a significant number of children experience life-altering changes. Since it was so difficult for me to gather participants, as a researcher, I also have to wonder if the sensitive nature of each child's situation may deter parents from wanting school personal to be privy to information coming from their individual homes. I also think there is something to be said regarding the pressures we are placing on little boys to somehow overcome life experiences without assistance. I pondered whether society as a whole is still requiring boys to be stronger due to their gender and the generational standards that have been imposed upon them. I am thankful that the four brave little boys that I studied were able to accomplish success in the program and hope that they will continue to be avid readers finding books that meet their emotional needs.

Possibilities for future research are not limited to young children; however, differing groups of children representing various demographics could be considered and compared. For instance, would bibliotherapy work in similar or dissimilar ways with African-American or Asian or Hispanic children? Would results be the same or different depending on socioeconomic

status and locale? Young adults and adults are also potential candidates for this type of study. Whether teens would be willing to participate in a bibliotherapeutic study is debatable. On the other hand, we may have teens figured out wrong and they may like the engagement with literature that involves reading and journaling. Adults, on the other hand would probably be pooled from Senior citizens that have time on their hands to read novels that would help them going through life-altering changes. The loss of a spouse is just one possibility where bibliotherapy could be used to assist an adult.

Bibliotherapy as seen throughout this case study has many positive effects for participants. Dealing with emotions surrounding a life-altering trauma may seem to be a difficult task, however, when you select appropriate books marginalized groups have the opportunity to grow emotionally. The children selected for the study clearly had individual problems that kept them from progressing whether it is by means of school work or simply managing their emotions. The stress brought on by their life-altering trauma was too difficult for them to take on without the assistance of a professional. Even though all of the students had a working relationship with their school counselor there were things that they were willing to share with me because I was an outsider and a non-threatening person in their lives. They did not feel as though the things they were sharing were being reported back to their parents or teachers. Even though I kept in close contact with the teachers and school counselors letting them know of the changes that were taking place during our sessions. For example, when Alexander made progress sharing I was sure to mention that progress to the school counselor. When Benjamin cried during our session I brought the circumstance to the attention of his teacher and the school counselor. When Christian and Ian were having difficulty getting to school on time I asked their teachers if it was causing a problem in their schoolwork. Therefore, change can be a good thing when we are dealing with life-altering trauma. When a child such as the four in this case study,



goes through changes their overall outlook on life can be altered. In conclusion, I do not think the study would have been nearly successful had the four little boys been so open and willing to share their life stories. This takes great courage and I think they are all on the way to recovery. Our short interaction was just the beginning of a life journey that they have begun to be productive and self-sustaining healthy individuals in society.

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# APPENDICIES

## Appendix A. Institutional Review Board Approval

### ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
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**TO:** Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell  
Curriculum & Instruction

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** November 5, 2014  
**RE:** IRB# 3532

**TITLE:** A Comparative Case Study: Does Literature Assist in Dealing with Children Going Through a Traumatic Obstacle?

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review type:** Full ☒ Expedited ☐ **Review date:** 10/31/2014

**Risk Factor:** Minimal ☐ Uncertain ☒ Greater Than Minimal ☐

**Approved** ☒ **Disapproved** ☐

**Approval Date:** 10/31/2014 **Approval Expiration Date:** 10/30/2015

**Re-review frequency:** (annual unless otherwise stated)

**Number of subjects approved:** 4

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –**  
Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

## **Appendix B. Consent Form**

### **Consent Form for Children Participant Study**

**1. Study Title:** A Comparative Case Study: Does Literature Assist in Dealing with Children going Through a Traumatic Obstacle?

**2. Performance Site:** A school or library in East Baton Rouge Parish

**3. Investigators:** The following investigator is available for questions about this study.

Michelle C. Benoit, email address:

michellebenoitlynn@gmail.com, 225-439-3930

**4. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to evaluate the use of literature as a part of using bibliotherapy with young children. In the six-week sessions I will use books with children to see if there is a significant change that occurs when reading and journaling. The problems presented in the study will all be preexisting and any abuse that has occurred will have been dealt with through the school counselor. In the event that abuse of the participant unfolds during the sessions then the facilitator will report such abuse to social services, the principal, the guidance counselor, and the parent. Dr. Jennifer Curry a social worker at LSU will be consulted to help determine if a child needs professional assistance. At that time, professional assistance will be solicited for the participant. The children will be given a selection of books to choose from and together we will read the books. If the child is unable to read the book will be read to them. If the child does have good literacy skills they will read the book alone then return for reflection. The change that occurs while these books are being used will be pivotal in analyzing the data collected.

**5. Subject Inclusion:** Primary participants will be currently enrolled in an East Baton Rouge Parish School.

**6. Number of Subjects:** 4

**7. Study Procedures:** The researcher will conduct interviews, journal writings, and audio tapings for the six-week session.

**8. Benefits:** The benefits to the participants are that they will gain universality by reading books about obstacles that they are actually going through at the time of the study.

**9. Risks:** All participants will be kept confidential by immediately assigning pseudonyms. The specifics of all data sources will be kept confidential. Original hard copies will be stored after work copies have been copied and blinded in order to maintain confidentiality. The possible risk is when dealing with these children they will need additional professional help and at that time after consulting with professional professors and mentors at LSU I will refer them to counseling.

The session will end and a new participant will be selected for the study. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**10.** According to Louisiana state law, The Louisiana Children’s Code, enacted August 1, 2014, training for “Mandated Reporters” including “health practitioners, teaching or child care providers, organizations or youth activity providers, and coaches” is required. As such I have completed an electronic course, “Louisiana Mandated Reporter Training” which is available on the State of Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services website at the following link: <https://moodle.dcfsls.la.gov/login/index.php>.

**11. Right to Refuse:** Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit. A twenty dollar gift card to barns and noble will be given as compensation for the participation in the study at the completion of the study.

**12. Subject:**

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have any questions about subjects’ rights or concerns, I can contact Dr. Dennis Landin, Ph.D. at the Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-5833, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigators obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

**13.** As the parent of the participant, I will have full access to the books that will be used for each session. I will be able to read the books and approve the content of what my child will be reading.

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Subject: Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
134 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

## **Appendix C. Assent Form**

### Assent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be in a study to use books when dealing with problems. Sometimes I will read and do journal entries. Other times, I may have a book read to me I have to follow all the classroom and school rules when working with the facilitator. I can decide to stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

Child's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D. Feelings Assessment

### Feelings Assessment

Rank each sentence below with 1= most of the time, 2= some of the time, 3= never

- \_\_\_ I am happy with my life.
- \_\_\_ I enjoy going to school.
- \_\_\_ I enjoy my life at home.
- \_\_\_ I feel bored.
- \_\_\_ I feel bullied at school.
- \_\_\_ I feel lonely most of the time.
- \_\_\_ I get upset when I am around other people.
- \_\_\_ It is hard for me to make friends.
- \_\_\_ I have a lot of friends.
- \_\_\_ I am angry.
- \_\_\_ I am creative and seldom bored.
- \_\_\_ I have a happy home.
- \_\_\_ I enjoy my teacher.
- \_\_\_ I am a worrier.
- \_\_\_ I have trouble sleeping.
- \_\_\_ I behave badly at home.
- \_\_\_ I do the best I can.
- \_\_\_ I am fearful.
- \_\_\_ I am loved.
- \_\_\_ I like to read.
- \_\_\_ I enjoy journaling.
- \_\_\_ The most important thing to me is to be happy.

## Appendix E. Motivation to Read Profile

**Figure 2**  
**Motivation to Read Profile**

Reading survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sample 1: I am in \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ Second grade ☐ Fifth grade  
☐ Third grade ☐ Sixth grade  
☐ Fourth grade

Sample 2: I am a \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ boy  
☐ girl

1. My friends think I am \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ a very good reader  
☐ a good reader  
☐ an OK reader  
☐ a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

- ☐ Never  
☐ Not very often  
☐ Sometimes  
☐ Often

3. I read \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ not as well as my friends  
☐ about the same as my friends  
☐ a little better than my friends  
☐ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ really fun  
☐ fun  
☐ OK to do  
☐ no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ almost always figure it out  
☐ sometimes figure it out  
☐ almost never figure it out  
☐ never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.

- ☐ I never do this.  
☐ I almost never do this.  
☐ I do this some of the time.  
☐ I do this a lot.

(continued)

**Figure 2**  
**Motivation to Read Profile (cont'd.)**

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ almost everything I read
- ☐ some of what I read
- ☐ almost none of what I read
- ☐ none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ very interesting
- ☐ interesting
- ☐ not very interesting
- ☐ boring

9. I am \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ a poor reader
- ☐ an OK reader
- ☐ a good reader
- ☐ a very good reader

10. I think libraries are \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ a great place to spend time
- ☐ an interesting place to spend time
- ☐ an OK place to spend time
- ☐ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ every day
- ☐ almost every day
- ☐ once in a while
- ☐ never

12. Knowing how to read well is \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ not very important
- ☐ sort of important
- ☐ important
- ☐ very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ can never think of an answer
- ☐ have trouble thinking of an answer
- ☐ sometimes think of an answer
- ☐ always think of an answer

14. I think reading is \_\_\_\_\_.

- ☐ a boring way to spend time
- ☐ an OK way to spend time
- ☐ an interesting way to spend time
- ☐ a great way to spend time

(continued)

**Figure 2**  
**Motivation to Read Profile (cont'd.)**

15. Reading is \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ very easy for me  
☐ kind of easy for me  
☐ kind of hard for me  
☐ very hard for me
16. When I grow up I will spend \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ none of my time reading  
☐ very little of my time reading  
☐ some of my time reading  
☐ a lot of my time reading
17. When I am in a group talking about stories, I \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ almost never talk about my ideas  
☐ sometimes talk about my ideas  
☐ almost always talk about my ideas  
☐ always talk about my ideas
18. I would like for my teacher to read books out loud to the class \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ every day  
☐ almost every day  
☐ once in a while  
☐ never
19. When I read out loud I am a \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ poor reader  
☐ OK reader  
☐ good reader  
☐ very good reader
20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ very happy  
☐ sort of happy  
☐ sort of unhappy  
☐ unhappy

terest them most. Figure 1 profiles the two instruments.

Because the MRP combines information from a group-administered survey instrument with an individual interview, it provides a useful tool for exploring more fully the personal dimensions of students' reading motivation. The MRP is highly individualized, which makes it particularly appropriate for inclusion in portfolio assessment.

*The Reading Survey.* This instrument consists of 20 items and uses a 4-point response scale (see Figure 2). The survey assesses two

specific dimensions of reading motivation: self-concept as a reader (10 items) and value of reading (10 items). The items that focus on self-concept as a reader are designed to elicit information about students' self-perceived competence in reading and self-perceived performance relative to peers. The value of reading items are designed to elicit information about the value students place on reading tasks and activities, particularly in terms of frequency of engagement and reading-related activities.

*The Conversational Interview.* The interview is made up of three sections (see Figure 3).

## Appendix F. Annotations and Discussion Questions to the Books

Boone, D. (1998). *Counting blessings*. Oregon: Resi, Inc.

Boone looks at life in a way that we can all count our blessings. A beautifully geometric shaped illustrated book does give the reader a sense of thinking about how they might have blessings in their own lives. The story is about a little boy who counts his blessings inside and out including his cat named Cleo. Through meditation and looking at life with the lens that not every day is a good day the character finds truth in looking towards a bright future. Readers will love the way this main character shows and counts the blessings in his life. They will also be able to count the blessings in their own lives through examples revealed in the book.

Discussion Question: What are ways that you can count blessings in your own life?

Brown, L. K. & Brown, M. (1986). *Dinosaurs divorce: A guide for changing families*. Boston: Joy Streets Books.

Brown and Brown highlight the essential stages of a person's experience with divorce from the view of a dinosaur family. They begin with the simple arguments that take place to the lawyers and to the reality that parents do remarry. The perspective of the dinosaur or the individual going through a divorce will relate to the depth of changes that occur when families split up. A tear jerker for some that are going through a divorce because it highlights all the real issues that a person goes through. The little dinosaur realizes that he is not in control of some things so he has to learn how to deal with the situation that he has been thrown into. A compelling beautifully illustrated book for children that will give vision to a problem that is fast occurring in our society today.

Discussion Question: How did you relate or have similarities with the dinosaur in the story? Does divorce look like this in your home?

Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The fall of Freddie the leaf*. New Jersey: Slack Incorporated.

Freddie the leaf is part of a group of friends that are all different. They are different by their colors and they each go through a separate voyage of life. The book describes the seasons and resonates how we as people go through seasons including death. The message of the book is that there is always new life after death and that the voyage of getting there is filled with people from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences. Freddie learns from his friends that although he has fallen to the ground he will become one with the earth and find a new place on this earth.

Discussion Question: In the seasons of life things die. Have you experienced things that change seasons in your life?

Cook, J. (2011). *The D word*. Tennessee: National Center of Youth Issues.

Saying the "D" word is hard for Otis. He just cannot accept the fact that his parents are going through a divorce. Otis sometimes feels like a spy because his parents rely on him to communicate between themselves. He finds hope when he speaks to his Gam who tells him some good advice. She tells him you didn't cause it, you cannot control it, and you are going to have to cope with it. When Otis realizes these three things his life begins to change. He gets his Gam to speak to his parents about not forcing him to communicate between them and things start to change for Otis. He becomes a better person because he is able to enjoy his mom and his dad even though they are not together anymore. Readers who are going through a divorce will understand Otis and find meaning in the text because it deals with the real issues of a divorce.

Discussion Question: Do your parents use you as a communicator to deal with their problems?

Goldblatt, R. (1957). *The boy who didn't want to be sad*. Washington: Magination Press.

This catchy illustrated cover with a boy sulking in the sun wearing bright yellow sneakers hooks the reader. The story is about a boy who is sad. The reason why he is sad is never explored in the story but the things he does is. He decides to get rid of everything that makes him happy in the book he even resorts to locking his parents out of his room. When he is all alone he begins to think about his life and all the good things that he does have. The boy decides to bring back all the good things in his life and embraces his problems with happiness in it. The ending is telling because it shows how with good things in our lives we can live happily ever after.

Discussion Question: What are the things in your life that make you sad? How can you think of things that can redirect your attention to things that make you happy?

Karst, P. (2000). *The invisible string*. California: DeVorss & Company, Publishers.

Liza and Jeremy are twins sharing a bedroom. One night the storm outside wakes them up and they both become very scared. When they run to their mother she tries to comfort them. She tells them that there is an invisible string that attaches people to them even when they are not there. This string is always present and it can attach to people like their uncle who died and is in heaven now. The twins find comfort in knowing that they don't have to be in the same room as someone to be connected to them. Knowing this, they go back to bed and dream of all the people they have invisible love strings with.

Discussion Question: Who do you have a love string with? How does this make you feel good?

Holmes, M. M. (1944). *A terrible thing happened*. New Jersey: Magination Press.

Something happened to this little raccoon but no one knows what it is. He has bad dreams and suffers throughout his days at school. Sometimes he has stomach aches and headaches but the thing that is disturbing him is so terrible that it makes his life very sad. The little raccoon finds help when he visits a school counselor Mrs. Maple and she helps him to draw the terrible thing that he saw. Children that are suffering from bad dreams or are going through difficult changes in their lives will relate to the main character in this book. Finding hope in people that love and care about you is the overarching theme in this book.

Discussion Question: Have you ever had a bad dream? How did it make you feel? What did you do to make yourself feel better?

Murphy, P. J. (2008). *Divorce and separation*. Illinois: Heinemann Library.

Murphy goes through the tumultuous stages that children go through when they are dealing with from the beginning of a separation to the finality of a divorce. Children will relate to this book because it speaks about how parents have to sign divorce papers and how lawyers and judges are involved in the process of getting a divorce. The most important concept shared in the book is that children who experience a divorce are going to have to go through changes that may not seem easy. The best advice given in the book is to trust the people that love you and you will be okay. Spending quality time with each parent is suggested and encouraged for children to help them engage in relationship with each parent individually.

Discussion Question: Do some of the stages in this book resemble your life going through a divorce with your parents?



Petty, K. & Kopper, L. (1988). *Splitting up*. New York: Aladdin Books, Ltd.

Maria and Sam are friends but Sam doesn't like the way Maria has been acting. Maria's parents are getting divorced because they fight all the time. Learning how to be a friend to Maria during this difficult time is hard but Sam finds a way. He learns that his parents fight but they are good friends and will never split up like Maria's parents. Sam gets to visit Maria's two homes one with her dad and one with her mom. This simple book helps the reader recognize how life with parents that are splitting up is like.

Discussion Question: Have you ever had a friend feel sad because her or his parents were going through a divorce? What did you do to make them feel better?

Shreeve, E. (2009). *Oliver at the window*. Pennsylvania: Front Street Press.

*Oliver at the Window* is a book about a little boy named Oliver that is dealing with his parents going through a divorce. He waits at the window at school never knowing who will come to pick him up from school. A simple story with a common message about children who live with the uncertainty of knowing who will pick them up from school due to the random schedules forced upon them due to being in a divorced home. Oliver overcomes his anxiety by interacting with friends and drawing and playing in centers at school. All children who are anxiously waiting for a parent to pick them up should read this book.

Discussion Question: Have you ever been forgotten at school by your parents? What did you do to make yourself feel better?

Silverstein, S. (1964). *The giving tree*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Silverstein tells a story from boy to old man and the relationship he has with his dear old favorite tree. When the boy is young he plays with the tree and climbs the tree and pretends that he is king of the jungle with a spray of the tree's leaves around his head like a crown. During the boy's life he needs things such as a house and a boat. The tree is willing to give to the boy even to the point of allowing him to be cut down to a stump so the boy could use his trunk. As an old man he uses the stump to sit on and ponder life and the choices that he has made in life. It is a story about the cycle of life and how giving on oneself can be rewarding even if it brings death.

Discussion Question: What did the tree give the boy? How are love connections significant to relationships?

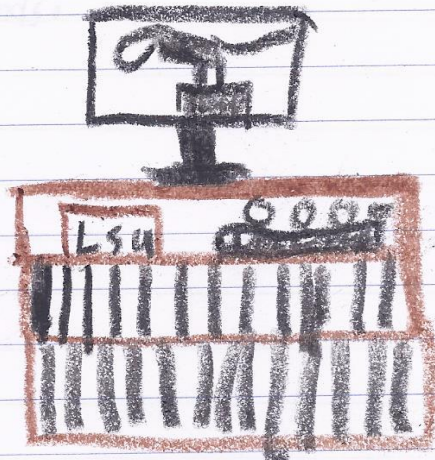
Thomas, P. (2000). *I miss you*. New York: Barron's.

Thomas presents a sequential experience of when someone dies. A tear jerker for those that have lost a loved one. This book speaks about how everyone dies and that sometimes in society the movies portray only bad people as dying. In truth the book points out that good people die too. Either they are old, sick, or something unusual happens to them. It shows the stages that a person goes through when dealing with death such as a funeral and wake. Not understanding why someone dies is a theme in the book and it speaks to the need of recreating a happy self by remembering the good memories that you had with the person that died.

Discussion Question: How did you feel when you went to your dad's funeral? Did you see and feel the same way as the character in the book?

## Appendix G. Alexander's Drawing

The Boy who Didn't Want to  
be Sad go to my  
parentes for help. wen one of  
pets dies. Watch a happy  
movie. thing of something else.  
play with my dog.



## **VITA**

Michelle Clare Benoit was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in July of 1969 to Frank and Linda Benoit. Benoit has three children Claire, Maggie, and Connor. They all live together in Louisiana. She graduated from an all-girls school for high-school named St. Joseph Academy. She then attended Loyola University where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Arts and Sciences with a major in Elementary Education. She then pursued a Master's degree at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge with an emphasis on Reading Education. Benoit accepted a graduate assistantship at LSU while working on her Ph.D. under the guidance of Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell. She taught for two consecutive semesters an education class that was a six-hour course teaching Reading, Writing, and Oral Communications for Elementary School Teachers. During her academic career, Michelle became certified to teach 1-8 grade and a certified librarian for grades K-12. She taught in elementary schools throughout her career.