

Enhancing Social and Emotional Skills in Primary Students through Integrated Social-Emotional Literature

by

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Enhancing Social and Emotional Skills in Primary Students through Integrated Social-
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This capstone paper investigates the impact of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) literature in elementary classrooms on the development of student's social and emotional wellness. In recognizing the critical role of social-emotional learning in early education, this capstone aims to determine whether exposure to literature that emphasizes empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, can positively influence young learners thus transforming educational environments and setting up students for future success.

Through a review of existing literature and research, the findings suggest that incorporating social-emotional literature significantly enhances students' abilities to understand and manage emotions, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and respectful decisions.

This paper highlights the benefits of incorporating SEL-focused literature into daily curricula, fostering a supportive and emotionally intelligent classroom environment. Implications for educators and counsellors include strategies for effectively integrating such literature into daily teaching practices to promote holistic student development. This paper contributes to the growing body of evidence that supports the inclusion of SEL in early education curricula and highlights the importance of addressing academic and emotional growth in primary educational settings.

As a significant part of this capstone, I have written and included an analysis of a social-emotional-themed children's book designed to highlight the importance of identifying emotions and providing support for children in this area. This book serves as a practical tool for teachers and counesllors, offering a resource to facilitate discussion about emtoins and promote emotional litearcy in elementary classrooms.

Key words: social-emotional learning, emotional intelligence, social learning theory, social-emotional literacy, read-aloud, empathy



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Enhancing Social and Emotional Skills in Primary Students through Integrated Social-Emotional Literature

Chapter 1: Introduction

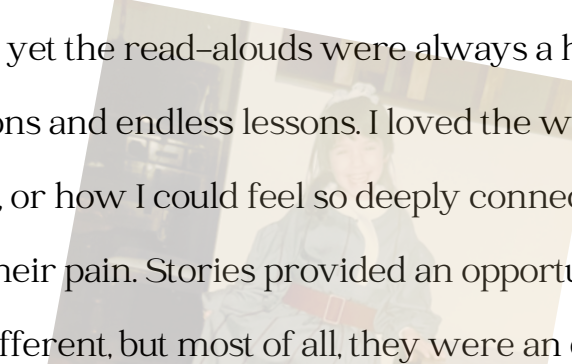

*“When you open a book and read of a character that thinks, feels, and loves the way
that you do, you feel less alone.”*

-Nikolas A.

This quote beautifully captures the essence of one of the many reasons why incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) through children's literature is crucial in the classroom setting. SEL-focused literature allows children to see their own experiences, emotions, and challenges reflected throughout the stories they read. This recognition promotes a sense of connection and community, helping learners to realize that their feelings are valid and shared by others. By identifying with storybook characters who navigate similar social and emotional narratives, students develop self-awareness, empathy, and emotional intelligence. These skills are foundational for building healthy relationships and developing coping mechanisms. Nurturing SEL in the classroom lends to architecting a supportive and inclusive classroom space where every child feels seen, heard, and understood. Prioritizing SEL before academics builds a foundation for learners to become resilient, compassionate individuals who are capable of navigating a range of challenging life circumstances. This capstone explores the transformative impact of children's literature in early primary classroom settings and emphasizes why nurturing SEL through literature is fundamental to a child's education and personal growth.




My Story



I can vividly recall being 6 years old, sitting at the feet of my grade one teacher on our classroom carpet area, surrounded by my classmates. As I gazed up at my teacher, the magic, and the power of the stories she read, would draw me in, making everyone else fade away. In my early school years, the classroom was a haven, a safe space where my thirst for learning was nurtured and I felt a true sense of belonging. I adored almost everything about school, yet the read-alouds were always a highlight. Different stories brought different emotions and endless lessons. I loved the way a book could transport me to an entirely new place, or how I could feel so deeply connected to the characters, feeling their sadness, their joy, their pain. Stories provided an opportunity to go somewhere new and become someone different, but most of all, they were an escape.

As I grew older, I realized that these stories did more than entertain, they nurtured empathy, sparked creativity, and imparted wisdom. A simple class read-aloud could comfort, inspire, and teach valuable lessons in the gentlest and most impactful ways. When I became a teacher myself, children's literature naturally became woven throughout our days and an integral part of our classroom. I loved how read-alouds opened doors to new worlds, allowing us all to enter together.

However, over the years, I noticed a gradual shift in my energy as an educator. The passion that once guided me began to fade. Increasingly negative classroom behaviours and less regulated students began taking a toll on me. I found myself, a seasoned educator, questioning my capacity to continue in the role. Recognizing the need for change, I re-examined my pedagogy and engaged with the curriculum through a revitalized lens. My programming evolved and I began to feel the passion I had felt for teaching, begin to rekindle.




Throughout my pedagogical transformation, one truth remained: The profound impact that children's literature has in the classroom and its ability to enhance a learning environment on numerous levels. I began integrating more SEL-themed literature into the daily curriculum and built a beautiful, rich, personal library of children's literature fostering emotional intelligence, that I could draw from consistently throughout the week. While I strive to provide my students with a hands-on, engaging curriculum, I have discovered that sometimes the simplest of materials, such as storybooks, can have the most tremendous impact.

Why Integrating Children's SEL Literature into Daily Curriculum Is Effective



I have found that consistently incorporating children's literature in the classroom setting is not only a practical teaching tool but also profoundly impactful as it effectively engages learners, facilitates content sharing, and fosters cohesion within the group. Reflecting on my years of teaching, the experience of connecting with groups of learners during read-alouds has offered times of sharing and community and has promoted efficient and effective collaboration. Literature in general, plays a crucial role in the classroom as it serves as a window into different worlds, experiences, and perspectives. (Delisle, 2020). Through story, students are exposed to complex emotions, social interactions, and moral dilemmas in an accessible way. Children's social-emotional literature also allows students to explore and understand SEL concepts safely and in an engaging manner. The use of story offers more than entertainment; it can be a medium through which students can reflect on their own lives and experiences and develop empathy and critical thinking skills in the process.



Creating More of What I Believe In

Because I wholeheartedly believe in utilizing children's literature as an impactful method of learning and building connections, this belief inspired me to create an interactive SEL-themed story that resonates with young learners. To gain insight into the specific needs of educators regarding the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning in the classroom, and thus focusing my book topic, I conducted an informal poll among a group of 15 educators across various elementary grade levels, within the same school district. The poll aimed to identify which SEL themes educators felt required increased support to effectively foster and enhance students' emotional intelligence.

I provided the educators with the following SEL themes to choose from: A) Learning to recognize and manage emotions, B) Social skills pertaining to cooperation, conflict resolution, and communication, C) Building relationships including empathy, kindness and connection, D) Coping strategies including resilience, perseverance and problem-solving and E) Fostering respect around diversity and inclusion. The results revealed a majority consensus between the themes of 'learning to recognize and manage emotions' and 'coping strategies including resilience, perseverance and problem-solving.' This feedback highlighted the areas where these educators felt most constrained and provided a clear direction for further developing the focus of my book. The story I wrote entitled 'The Feelings We Share' aims to address the identification of emotions, normalizing of emotional expression and modelling of evidence-based strategies that promote resilience and regulation, while emphasizing the importance of these concepts from a psychoeducational perspective.

Addressing Classroom Challenges with SEL Literature

Having worked in public education over the past 18 years, I have noted it is commonly expressed by tenured teachers that the profession has become increasingly challenging, largely due to the sentiment that 'children have changed.' I too have observed drastic changes in student behaviour over the past two decades however I do not hold the belief that children have fundamentally changed, but rather drastic change has occurred across their lived experiences. From a societal perspective, significant changes in social and familial structures as well as the technological landscape, have influenced our students, thus impacting behaviours (Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). From my observations, many students today appear to have difficulty with emotional self-regulation and independently engaging in healthy coping strategies such as resilience building, perseverance, and problem-solving. Both student and teacher wellness are more likely to occur when students experience improved emotional self-regulation, thus it is my objective to analyze the impact of incorporating SEL-themed literature that lends to emotional regulation and share these findings with fellow educators and counsellors.


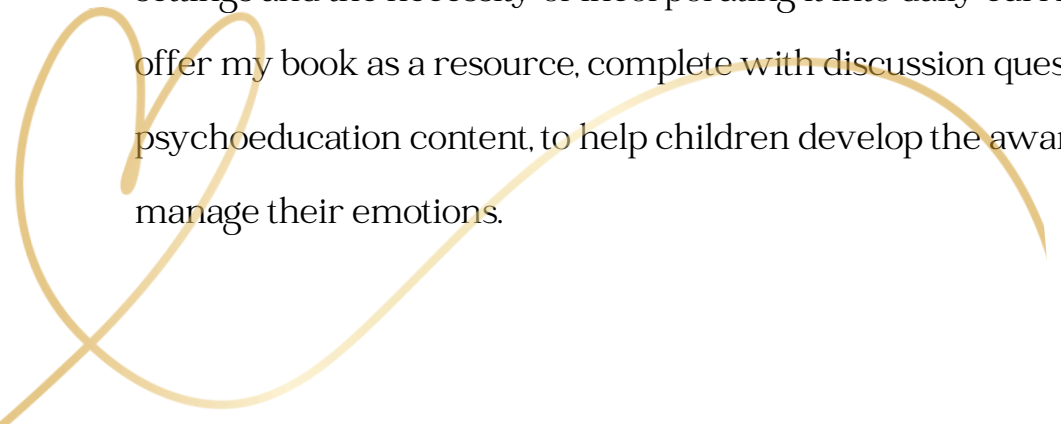
Research Question

Does regularly integrating SEL-themed literature into elementary classroom practice, influence students' emotional intelligence?



Significance of the Capstone

Educators often have access to SEL-themed literature, which can be an effective tool for teaching emotional intelligence in the classroom. Building on research which emphasizes the benefits of consistently integrating SEL literature, I aim to support educators by promoting an evidence-based method for delivering effective SEL instruction. Through counsellor-led presentations and workshops, I intend to highlight the importance of regularly using SEL-based literature in classroom settings and the necessity of incorporating it into daily curricula. Additionally, I will offer my book as a resource, complete with discussion questions and psychoeducation content, to help children develop the awareness to identify and manage their emotions.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

SEL is grounded in several psychological and educational theories, including the theories of emotional intelligence popularized by Daniel Goleman and Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. These frameworks emphasize the importance of learning through observation and interaction, which when intentionally applied and integrated, can be facilitated by SEL literature.




Hey Little Ant-A Practical Application of the Theory of Emotional Intelligence through SEL Literature in the Classroom

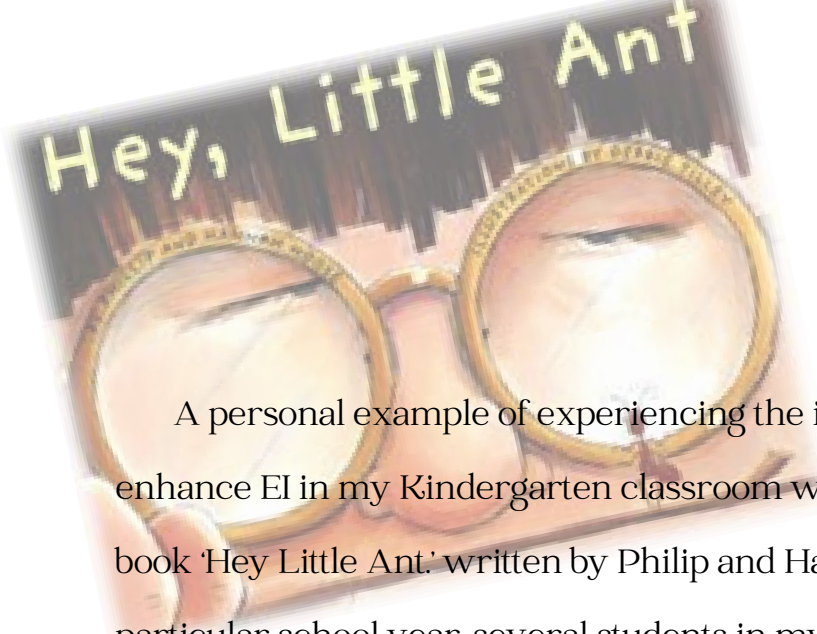
The theory of emotional intelligence, suggests that emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses the ability to understand, manage, perceive, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Goleman, 1995). This theory states that individuals with high emotional intelligence can better navigate social complexities, build healthier social relationships, and make informed decisions. In the context of education, nurturing EI in early learners is crucial for their social and emotional development. Fostering EI equips students with the skills necessary to succeed both academically and socially (Shermukhamedovna, 2024). While traditional views of effective teaching primarily focused on the mastery of subject matter, current evidence highlights the fact that “effective teaching extends beyond these factors and encompasses the ability to understand and manage one’s own emotions and those of others” (Shermukhamedovna, 2024).

Integrating social–emotional learning literature into the classroom is an effective method of supporting and promoting emotional intelligence among learners. SEL literature often highlights stories that emphasize ranging emotional circumstances and social interactions, providing students with characters and situations that may be relatable to their own experiences. By engaging with these types of narratives, learners can begin to recognize and express their own emotions, as well as articulate and understand the emotions of themselves and others. This process aligns with the EI aspect of emotional awareness, allowing students to develop a nuanced understanding of the emotional states of not only themselves but also of others.

In addition, SEL literature functions as a tool that is practical for teaching emotional regulation, a key aspect of emotional intelligence (Schoppmann et al., 2023). Stories that showcase characters navigating emotional challenges often offer students strategies for managing their emotions in a constructive manner. An example of a character learning to cope with sadness, grief, or frustration, can model effective and healthy coping mechanisms for children. This provides the opportunity for teachers to facilitate discussions around these experiences, encouraging learners to reflect on how they might engage similar strategies in their own experiences. By integrating this reflective practice, it aids in allowing students to internalize a range of skills that can effectively regulate their emotions.

A key aspect of integrating SEL literature is that it supports the development of empathy. (Kucirkova, 2019). Empathy is an essential component of emotional intelligence and through stories, children are exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences which aids in fostering an emotionally comprehensive understanding of others. As students read about characters from diverse backgrounds who have experienced varying challenges, they can better learn to navigate complex human emotions and relationships. Increased empathy impacts learners not only in the classroom but extends beyond, having the capacity to enhance learners' ability to form strong connections and work optimally with others in a range of settings (Kucirkova, 2019).





A personal example of experiencing the impact of SEL literature and its capacity to enhance EI in my Kindergarten classroom was observed when utilizing the Children's book 'Hey Little Ant.' written by Philip and Hannah Hoose (Hoose et al., 1998). In one particular school year, several students in my class were having difficulty engaging in respectful interactions with living insects during recess and lunch. I was repeatedly receiving reports from students of this harm occurring. While we continued to discuss the importance of caring for and showing respect for living creatures, the accounts of causing harm to insects continued to occur. 'Hey Little Ant,' is a story about a little boy about to stomp on an ant that he encounters on the sidewalk. As the boy is about to harm the ant, the insect begins pleading for his life and a conversation between the two characters begins.

I chose to utilize this story to improve empathy amongst the group towards living creatures as the author gives the ant a voice. By attributing human-like characteristics and emotions to the ant, the literature allowed children to emotionally connect with it. This connection makes it harder for students to rationalize causing harm to something they perceive as having feelings similar to their own. Humanizing the ant also enhances the ability of children to understand how others feel and engage in perspective-taking which is crucial for empathy development. When the students were able to understand, even on a fictional level through story, how the ant might have felt, they began to show that they were less likely to cause harm. This is just one of many examples of how stories can be used as powerful tools to shape beliefs and behaviours.



The theory of emotional intelligence highlights the importance of managing, perceiving, and regulating emotions. (Goleman, 1995). By integrating children's SEL literature into the classroom this directly supports improved emotional intelligence by providing children with stories that are relatable and offers diverse strategies for emotional growth (Garces-Bacsal, 2020). By fostering emotional regulation, awareness and empathy, literature that is rooted in SEL, equips learners with the tools they need for meaningful social relationships and personal improvement. Utilizing this approach not only enhances student's emotional intelligence but also contributes to a more empathetic, holistic, and emotionally supportive school environment.

The above infographic was created by the Housman Institute, an early childhood organization that seeks to provide research-based cognitive and SEL solutions for schools, educators, mental health professionals, parents administrators and caregivers (Housman Institute, 2021). The clarity of this poster ensures it can be used as a tool that can be easily shared with parents, counsellors, and educators to clearly explain why the use of SEL Children's literature can be so simple yet impactful in enhancing young learners' Emotional Intelligence.

Connecting Social Learning Theory and the Importance of Social-Emotional Literature

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of modelling and observing the emotional behaviours and reactions of others. According to Social Learning Theory, emotional learning occurs most often in social contexts and can be strengthened through observation and interactions that directly take place with others (Yildirim, 2020). SEL literature that is integrated directly into school curriculum closely connects with the principles of Social Learning Theory as students have the capacity to learn directly from the behaviours and experiences of story characters and their narratives.



The story of 'Hey Little Ant' activates behaviour modelling, a component of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) as the boy in the story models listening, reflecting and considering the insect's perspective. The students are able to identify with the boy in the story who chose to spare the ant and, in my experience, began modelling similar behaviours themselves in the school setting. SEL literature often displays characters' navigating emotional situations and social challenges, which serves as modelling and instruction for young students. By identifying the emotions displayed, as well as how story characters can resolve conflicts, regulate emotion, and build healthier relationships, children can learn social and emotional behaviours and responses that are appropriate and effective (Heath et al. 2017). An example of this might be observed in a story focusing on a character who navigates peer pressure successfully or mends a social relationship after conflict. These narratives allow students to observe and reflect upon practical scenarios that are relevant to them. Teachers can enhance this learning by facilitating discussions and activities that encourage students to reflect on and apply these behaviours in their own lives.

Social Learning Theory also recognizes the role of positive reinforcement in SEL learning (Bandura, 1977). SEL literature can be an effective tool for reinforcing positive attitudes, behaviours, skills, and beliefs. For example, when a character in a story is praised or rewarded for their positive behaviours, both externally or through the intrinsic experience of displaying empathy, emotional regulation reinforces SEL behaviours through lessons that identify rewarding students when they display comparable behaviours in the classroom, creating a positive feedback cycle that promotes social and emotional skill development.



Beyond reinforcement and modeling, Social Learning Theory emphasizes self-efficacy which is an individual's unique belief in their ability to succeed in specific scenarios (Betzael & Shechtman, 2017). SEL-themed literature can help foster students' self-efficacy by showcasing story characters that might overcome challenges or achieve their goals through resilience and a willingness to persevere. These characters are also likely to model social-emotional regulation. As young learners continue to observe storybook characters who are like them, succeed, they are more likely to believe in their capacity to navigate comparable experiences. Improved self-efficacy allows students to model and practice the social and emotional skills they have been taught through SEL-themed literature integration.

Integrating SEL children's literature in elementary classrooms fosters a diverse approach to enhancing multifaceted SEL through a Social Learning Theory lens. Through providing relevant models, reinforcing positive behaviours, and enhancing self-efficacy, literature rooted in SEL can allow children to internalize, practice and improve developing social and emotional skills. This method not only fosters student development but also lends to a more cohesive and regulated classroom environment where healthy social interactions are reinforced, modelled, and nurtured.

Planting the Seeds of Social-Emotional Learning

Children's literature is an easily integrated, but commonly overlooked method of intervention to address emotional challenges in the classroom. Through engaging stories and characters that students can relate to, children's books can provide accessible and meaningful learning. By integrating SEL themes into the curriculum through intentional education and carefully selected children's literature, educators can promote a deeper connection to the material, making often abstract SEL concepts, become both relatable and tangible. SEL literature captures young learners' imaginations, in turn promoting engagement, allowing for rich learning experiences that foster emotional regulation and build a lifelong foundation for social and emotional intelligence.

In my experience, fostering SEL in students through children's literature is a process that requires consistency, time and thoughtful integration into the daily curriculum. I compare the notion of nurturing children's emotional growth to that of planting and tending to a garden.

Just as a gardener must carefully plan and tend to their garden, educators must approach SEL with intention and preparation. While some flowers bloom quickly and others take longer, consistent maintenance ensures that all plants thrive to their fullest potential. Similarly, some students may quickly grasp SEL concepts, while others require ongoing support and different interventions. Even the most beautiful gardens need regular care; likewise, SEL cannot flourish on its own after initial instruction. Continuous nurturing is essential for lasting growth. Educators and clinicians must recognize that fostering emotional well-being in students is an ongoing process that necessitates preparation and persistent engagement. By diligently tending to the emotional development of our students, we can help them achieve their fullest potential, just as a well-maintained garden will flourish and yield best results.

What the Data Show

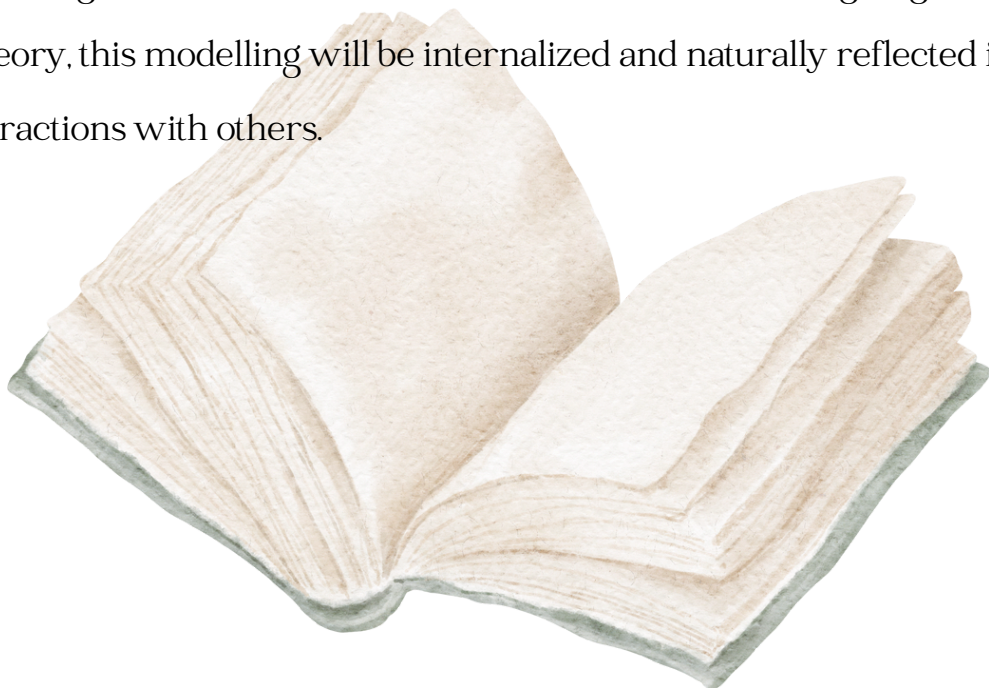
It's important to distinguish between using children's literature to teach general concepts and understanding how children use the information from these books to modify their social behaviour. Although many studies have explored the efficacy of Children's literature rooted in SEL on emotional intelligence and social behaviour adaptations, recent long-term studies, extending beyond eight weeks, are scarce. A short-term 8-week mixed-method pilot study entitled "Connecting to themselves and the world: Engaging young children in read-alouds with social-emotional learning" (Bennett et al., 2023) reveals statistically significant findings in terms of SEL-related verbal interactions. This research focused on the integration of SEL literacy read-alouds using multicultural texts. The purpose of the study was to determine if student participation in read-aloud sessions with SEL-integrated literature could enhance young learners' acquisition of SEL development and vocabulary (Bennett et al., 2023). The research was conducted in response to the perceived negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on children's emotional intelligence, specifically in the area of social interactions. The research aimed to develop Student's SEL vocabulary and social, and emotional growth (Bennett et al., 2023).

The study used an SEL framework to address core competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Bennett et al., 2023). It emphasized inclusivity, ensuring that all materials were culturally diverse and relevant to learners from various backgrounds. Using a convergent parallel mixed-method design, the research integrated both qualitative and quantitative elements, evaluating them equally to provide a comprehensive analysis (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2017). The study included twenty K-3 students and three adult volunteers in an afterschool program. Data were collected through web-based SEL assessments, an SEL vocabulary assessment, observation forms, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews (Bennett et al., 2023).

Quantitative analysis using web-based SEL assessments showed no significant improvement in overall SEL scores. However, there was a significant enhancement in SEL vocabulary understanding and application, leading to better verbal interactions. This indicated an improvement in SEL-related term usage, resulting in more meaningful peer interactions.

Qualitative findings highlighted effective instructional practices in read-aloud sessions, such as using multicultural books, open-ended questions, and encouraging personal connections to the literature. These strategies increased student engagement and understanding of SEL concepts.


The findings from this study align closely with my own experience. Although the overall SEL scores showed only minimal improvement, the results reinforce my belief that developing SEL in a group setting requires time and is most effective when literature supporting emotional intelligence is integrated consistently into the curriculum. Students need time to internalize the concepts they engage with through SEL literature before they can consistently exhibit these behaviours. This process is gradual. I hypothesize that as students become more adept at using SEL language, they will, over time, model emotionally intelligent behaviours across various SEL domains. Aligning with Social Learning Theory, this modelling will be internalized and naturally reflected in the student's interactions with others.



Additionally, this study was conducted in an after-school program where student attendance was inconsistent and where children participated after completing a full day of school. Managing difficult behaviours was reported as a challenge, likely due to fatigue causing increased student dysregulation combined with inconsistent attendance. I believe this inconsistency hindered the development of a stronger sense of community in the after-school setting compared to what students typically experience during the regular school day. Given the limited hours students spend in after-school care compared to their time in the classroom, I feel the consistent integration of SEL and effective instruction within the classroom setting would be more efficient and impactful than in an after-school environment.

Of the studies I've reviewed on the impact of Social and Emotional Learning-themed children's books, consistently positive results are reported. The overarching research shows that these books effectively help children develop essential SEL competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). Exposure to SEL-themed literature enriches children's emotional vocabulary, allowing them to better identify and express their emotions, which in turn enhances their emotional regulation and empathy (Heath et al., 2017). Teachers report a reduction in disruptive behaviours and an increase in positive behaviours such as cooperation, sharing, and conflict resolution in classrooms where SEL-themed books are regularly used (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).

SEL-themed books engage students more deeply, boosting their motivation to participate in discussions and activities related to SEL topics (Zins et al., 2004). Additionally, integrating SEL literature can create a more supportive and positive classroom environment, associated with higher levels of student engagement, lower occurrences of bullying, and improved teacher-student relationships (Reyes et al., 2012). While the primary focus is on social and emotional outcomes, several studies suggest that SEL interventions, including themed books, can indirectly improve academic performance by creating a more conducive learning environment (Denham & Brown, 2010).



The success of using SEL-themed books often depends on teacher readiness and the quality of implementation, with professional development and resources for teachers enhancing the effectiveness of these interventions (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). Longitudinal studies suggest that the benefits of SEL-themed books can have lasting effects, with students maintaining improved social and emotional skills over time, thus highlighting their value as tools for promoting SEL and improving classroom regulation (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Durlak et al., 2011).

Practical Implementation of SEL-Themed Children's Books

Integration

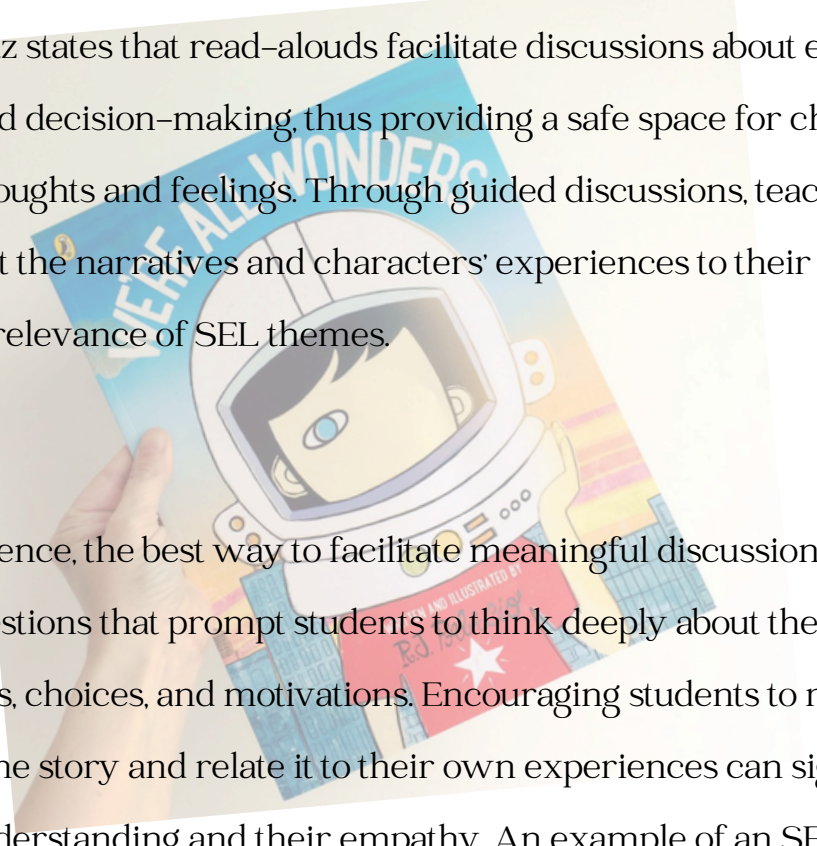
The effective use of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) themed children's books in the classroom requires thoughtful planning and implementation. While a simple tool to have on hand to access, educators can maximize the impact of these books by integrating them into read-aloud sessions, discussion activities, and cross-curricular connections. SEL-themed books do not need to be accessed as a stand-alone resource and isolated as a subject in themselves. For instance, a teacher can incorporate SEL literature into math lessons by selecting stories that emphasize themes such as perseverance, problem-solving, and collaboration. After reading a book about a character who overcomes challenges through determination and teamwork, the teacher can facilitate math activities that require students to reflect on their work, both individually and in groups as they work to solve complex problems.



The 'Most Magnificent Thing' by Ashley Spires (Spires, 2014) follows a young girl who sets out to create the 'most magnificent thing' but encounters numerous challenges along the way. Her journey relays lessons about creativity, determination and the importance of learning from our mistakes. By reading this type of children's book during a math lesson, educators can emphasize themes of problem-solving and determination and encourage students to persevere and approach math problems with a similar mindset. This approach not only reinforces the concepts often crucial to success in subjects like math but also allows students to practice important SEL skills in a real-world context. Integration of SEL across subjects can lead to improved academic performance and better classroom behavior, as students develop a more comprehensive understanding of how these skills apply to all areas of their lives (Zins et al., 2004). By embedding SEL into subjects like math, teachers can help students see the relevance of these skills beyond the classroom and promote a more supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Meaningful Discussion

Research indicates using read-alouds specifically targets SEL competencies, allowing children to engage with the material on a deeper level provides opportunities for group discussions which is an essential component of their efficacy (Schultz, 2020). In her study 'Using Read Aloud to Target Social-Emotional Learning' Schultz states that read-alouds facilitate discussions about emotions, relationships, and decision-making, thus providing a safe space for children to express their thoughts and feelings. Through guided discussions, teachers can help students connect the narratives and characters' experiences to their own lives, reinforcing the relevance of SEL themes.

A hand is shown holding a children's book. The book cover is blue and features a cartoon astronaut with a yellow face and blue eyes, wearing a white space helmet and a blue and red spacesuit. The title 'WE'RE ALL WONDERERS' is written in large, white, stylized letters at the top. Below the astronaut, there is a red banner with white text that reads 'BY AND ILLUSTRATED BY R.J. PALACIO'. The background of the book cover is a colorful, abstract pattern of yellow, orange, and blue.

In my experience, the best way to facilitate meaningful discussions is by asking open-ended questions that prompt students to think deeply about the characters' emotions, actions, choices, and motivations. Encouraging students to make personal connections to the story and relate it to their own experiences can significantly deepen their understanding and their empathy. An example of an SEL-themed children's book that I have used consistently in my programming to facilitate rich group discussions is 'Wonder' by R.J. Palacio. This book follows Auggie, a young boy with physical differences, as he navigates school for the first time. This story highlights themes of kindness, acceptance, empathy, bullying and a general desire to belong. These themes are ones that students encounter in their daily lives, creating the ability to see parts of themselves or their peers in the characters, thus making the story more personal and engaging.

Additionally, creating a safe and inclusive environment where all students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings is vital for meaningful discussions. By thoughtfully incorporating read-aloud and guiding reflective conversations, teachers can enhance students' social and emotional growth while also building their literacy skills.

In the article 'The Benefits of Interactive Read-Alouds to Address Social-Emotional Learning in Classrooms for Young Children', the authors argue that integrating interactive read-alouds into the curriculum, provides a valuable tool for enhancing SEL, making it a crucial component of early childhood education (Britt et al., 2016). Included in this article is a comprehensive table that highlights seven SEL-themed Children's books, the skills they address, examples of questions to ask before the reading, during the reading, after the reading, and various post-reading activities. This chart provides excellent examples of general questions and activities that educators can use with a range of books.

Read Aloud Enrichment and Discussion Questions:

54 Journal of Character Education Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016

Table 2.
Read-Aloud Questions and Enrichment Activities

<i>Book</i>	<i>Social-Emotional Skills Addressed</i>	<i>Before the Reading Questions</i>	<i>During the Reading Questions</i>	<i>After the Reading Questions</i>	<i>Postreading Activities</i>
<i>Calm Down Time</i> (Verdick, 2010)	Strategies for calming down when emotionally triggered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does it mean to be calm? What can you do to help yourself feel calm? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give your body a squeeze. How do you feel? Can you ask for hug? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which of the calm down activities would you try? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice how to take deep breaths, role play going to time out/crazy spot.
<i>The Energy Bus</i> (Gordon & Scott, 2012)	Overcoming adversity and staying positive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you think of a time when you had a bad day? What were some things that happened when you had a bad day? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some ways we can put "fuel" in our minds? How does Joy, the bus driver, help the children? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you show kindness to others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw a picture of a bullying experience and a positive vision picture.
<i>How Full Is Your Bucket?</i> (Rath & Meekmeyer, 2009)	Developing a positive outlook toward self and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you feel when people say mean things to you? How do you feel when people say nice things to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did Felix "dip" from his sister's bucket? What are some ways that Felix's bucket dripped? What put drops back into Felix's bucket? What happened when Felix's bucket was full? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What could you do to fill other people's buckets? What are some ways you can fill your own bucket? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a class bucket for students to place statements of positive feelings towards others.
<i>The Invisible Boy</i> (Ludwig & Barton, 2013)	Feeling like you don't fit in / learning to include others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you feel if you were being ignored? Do you ever feel afraid to join in and play with others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is Brian different from the other children? What happened to help Brian feel included? How does Brian change throughout story? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you want to play with someone, what are some things you can do? How can you include other people in your activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in class bonding activity, e.g., expressing gratitude for classmates, writing positive statements about peers, or sharing a favorite game or activity.
<i>Stand in My Shoes</i> (Somson, 2013)	How to show empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some different feelings you know? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does it mean to have empathy? How does empathy help us connect with other people? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some new feelings you have learned? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher think-aloud of scenarios involving different feelings that allow students to share personal connections.

(Table continues on next page)

The Benefits of Interactive Read-Alouds to Address Social-Emotional Learning in Classrooms for Young Children 55

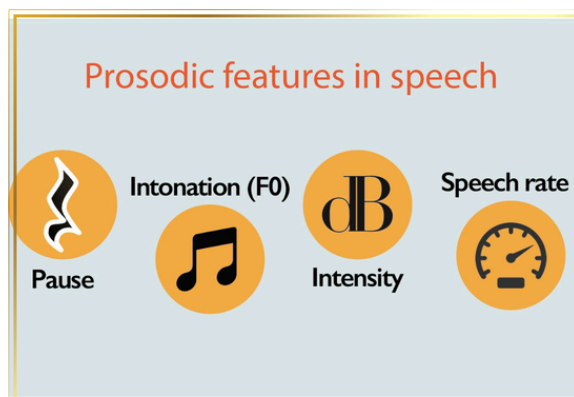
Table 2 (Continued)

Book	Social-Emotional Skills Addressed	Before the Reading Questions	During the Reading Questions	After the Reading Questions	Postreading Activities
Zach Apologizes (Mulcahy & McKee, 2012)	How to reconcile with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does it mean to apologize? Have you ever apologized to someone? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why does Zach think he's right? (p. 2) How does Zach look after he apologizes (p. 20) compared to how he looked earlier? (p. 2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does apologizing help you feel better? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a four square apology based on a recent conflict.
Zach Gets Frustrated (Mulcahy & McKee, 2012)	How to identify triggers and manage frustration through positive reframing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does "frustrated" mean to you? Name one thing that makes you frustrated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was Zach's real problem? (p. 2) How did Zach connect his kite problem to another problem he had experienced? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you make yourself feel better when you are frustrated? What are some good thoughts that help you when you are frustrated? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete frustration triangle. Practice chill skills.

Capturing Young Learners with Prosody- 'The Music of Language'

What is Prosody? Though the term 'prosody' might not be familiar to many, yet unintentionally incorporating prosody into daily read-aloud has been a constant practice in my teaching. Prosody refers to the expressive elements of reading, such as timing, emphasis, intonation, and phrasing, which make the reading more engaging and livelier (Cutler et al., 1987). Beyond making the text more appealing, prosody effectively connects with readers by stimulating neural circuits associated with emotional significance, activating regions of the neocortex (Lawson, 2012). Research shows that prosodic cues, including pitch, tempo, rhythm, loudness, and tonal variations, are crucial for conveying syntax and meaning, impacting the listener's emotional state and evoking feelings of pleasure (Plante et al., 2006). Since pleasure is fundamental to children's language development, the enjoyment of being read aloud to enhances their engagement which is foundational for comprehension of all subject matter, including SEL learning.

Teacher expression, tone, and gestures significantly enhance students' understanding of the text thus contributing to the contribution of SE through children's literature. Expressive reading has the power to bring stories to life, naturally allowing students to grasp the emotions and intentions of characters. By using ranges of intonation, facial expressions, and body language, teachers can model emotional responses and social cues that help students to develop empathy and overarching emotional awareness. These non-verbal cues also aid in comprehension, as students can better infer context and meaning. While reading with expression and animation may not come naturally for all educators, the simplest of adjustments, such as altering voices to match different characters and using tones that reflect the narrator's moods, can create a dynamic and interactive read-aloud experience for students (Britt et al., 2016). Additionally, facial expressions and hand gestures can enhance students' enjoyment and captivation when listening to text, further supporting their engagement and comprehension.



Content Matters

I have personally identified a noticeable increase in the publication of SEL-themed children's literature spanning throughout my time as an educator. I believe this surge can be attributed to the growing recognition of the importance of social-emotional learning. Educators and families are frequently seeking out resources to aid in the development of skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, problem solving and cooperation. The increasing availability and use of SEL-themed literature reflects the wider trend of integrating it into early childhood education.

Choosing the appropriate literature to integrate, however, is key. Educators need to utilize SEL literature that resonates with students' experiences and backgrounds. In the journal article 'Capturing the Social-Emotional Learning Through Children's Literature' discusses the importance of selecting books that reflect diverse cultures, challenges, and triumphs (Morton and Akram, 2022). By incorporating texts that reflect learners' experiences and identities, educators can create a more inclusive classroom setting that encourages empathy and understanding. This approach not only engages students and invites discussions, but also allows them to see themselves in the stories, enhancing their emotional connection to the material.



In addition, it is essential to create an inclusive and diverse library of SEL-themed books that reflect the backgrounds and experiences of all students. In their article reviewing the recent research of practical strategies for promoting Children's social and emotional competence in schools, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl share that according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019), diverse literature can help students see themselves in the stories they read, fostering a sense of belonging and validation, it also exposes them to different cultures and viewpoints, promoting inclusivity and social awareness (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Once literature has been selected, an effective method for increasing its impact on student's emotional intelligence is the use of thematic units, where a series of books focused on a particular SEL theme, such as empathy or resilience, are explored over several weeks (Heath et al., 2017). This sustained focus allows students to delve deeper into the topics and reinforces the SEL skills being targeted, through repeated exposure and practice.

Key Interventions

Based on my review of the research, I have identified key interventions that significantly enhance emotional intelligence. To aid educators in effectively integrating SEL literature into their classrooms, I have created a visual guide that simplifies these critical steps. This resource is designed to ensure that the implementation of SEL practices is both impactful and straightforward.



Supporting Educators

To integrate SEL-themed children's literature across the curriculum effectively, professional development and collaboration among educators are essential. My goal is to support educators by sharing insights from the research I've reviewed on the positive impact of consistently incorporating SEL literature along with specific strategies for doing so. I am enthusiastic about promoting and participating in workshops and professional development sessions that equip educators with the necessary skills, knowledge, and strategies to effectively integrate SEL-themed literature into their curricula. By promoting a collaborative environment where teachers can share resources, discuss experiences, and reflect on their practices, we can enhance the overall implementation of SEL in classrooms. As educators integrate SEL-themed children's books into their teaching practices, they will significantly contribute to students' social and emotional growth, creating a more positive classroom environment and likely improving academic outcomes.

Chapter 3: Recommendations, Resources and Rationale

Recommendations

Practical Support for Teachers

“. More books!” This is the enthusiastic chant that would fill my classroom when in my playful tone, I would utter the words, “Oops, I did it again...” Year after year, my students came to recognize the phrase ‘Oops I did it again...’ as a signal that a new, beautiful piece of children’s literature had joined our cherished SEL-themed book collection. This simple phrase notoriously introduced the arrival of stories that sparked discussions, activities, and deeper connections within our classroom community.

Over the years, I envisioned what it would be like to curate a beautifully decorated and thoughtfully labelled SEL book cart that could travel across different classrooms. Now, no longer an enrolling teacher, I plan to create a similar cart for my staff and will be seeking funding opportunities to bring this vision to life. Armed with evidence-based research supporting the impact of SEL literature, I am confident that this portable library will make a tremendous difference in elementary classrooms. I intend to present this concept to future administrators and teacher-librarians, showcasing the potential benefits for student social and emotional development.



To ensure the integrity of my collection, I carefully select books by adhering to the following guidelines before purchasing any new literature. First, I evaluate whether the book was tailored to the developmental needs of the students I work with and whether its themes align with the emotional targets I aim to instill. Second, I ensure that the book reflects diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, allowing students to learn from different perspectives. Third, I research the authors' backgrounds and expertise in social-emotional learning, prioritizing those with experience in child psychology, counselling, or education. If an author does not meet this criterion, I vet the stories to ensure they align with my belief systems. It's important to note that I apply this vetting process, albeit not as rigorously, to authors with extensive credentials as well. Lastly, I emphasize the importance of a combination of visual appeal and concise text. I have learned that maintaining young learners' engagement requires a balance, with captivating illustrations that convey emotions and text that is not too lengthy. Books with excessive text on each page risk losing the focus of the young audience.

When supporting teachers in selecting appropriate literature for their classes, I encourage them to follow similar guidelines. However, it's important to streamline this process, especially when searching for specific themes. After an extensive search, I was surprised I was unable to find any websites categorizing SEL-themed children's literature. To address this, I created a digital catalogue of my personal favourite SEL-themed books that serve as SEL bibliotherapy. To create this, I chose the online platform Canva because it is easily customizable and can be edited in real-time. When users click on each book on the bookshelf a specific link for that book appears which will take them to googlebooks.ca, providing further information about the authors, illustrators, book overviews and any other works by the same author. In addition, each book also contains a link to an online read-aloud of that particular work. The books are categorized based on SEL targets or experiences that educators and counsellors may need support with:



There is some crossover between these categories as many works of literature bridge SEL themes. It's important to note that this is a working document and I anticipate its evolution. However, I am pleased with this initial curation and eager to share it with staff and families to ease their search process.

Digital SEL-Themed Literature Catalogue

To access book information, posted below is the link to the SEL Catalogue:



Creating SEL Literature as a Tool to Use and Share with Fellow Educators and Counsellors

In addition to providing staff with a collection of SEL literature to choose from, I sought to create a children's book that addressed the challenges my colleagues frequently encountered regarding emotional intelligence in their classrooms. This book was designed to be a classroom tool that I would use in small or whole group instruction as a school counsellor, to educate and spark discussions on themes such as recognizing and managing emotions, as well as coping strategies like resilience, perseverance, and problem-solving.

As I began the writing process, I quickly realized that I might have underestimated the task. I was naïve about the complexities involved.

However, Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde's quote perfectly captures this experience: "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well. If it is worth having, it is worth waiting for, if it is worth attaining, it is worth fighting for. If it is worth experiencing, it is worth putting aside time for."

Although I often feel that my efforts are not enough, I knew that investing the time and energy into writing this book would be worthwhile. As a child, my father and I had plans to write a children's book together. While his health has now prevented us from accomplishing this dream together, I wanted to write this book in his honor and realized there was no sense in waiting any longer.

Regardless of how overwhelming my life felt, the time simply felt right.

Ultimately, I wanted readers to experience positive emotions and gain some level of education or insight from my book. I truly hope that "The Feelings We Share" offers that for its readers.

The Book Writing Process

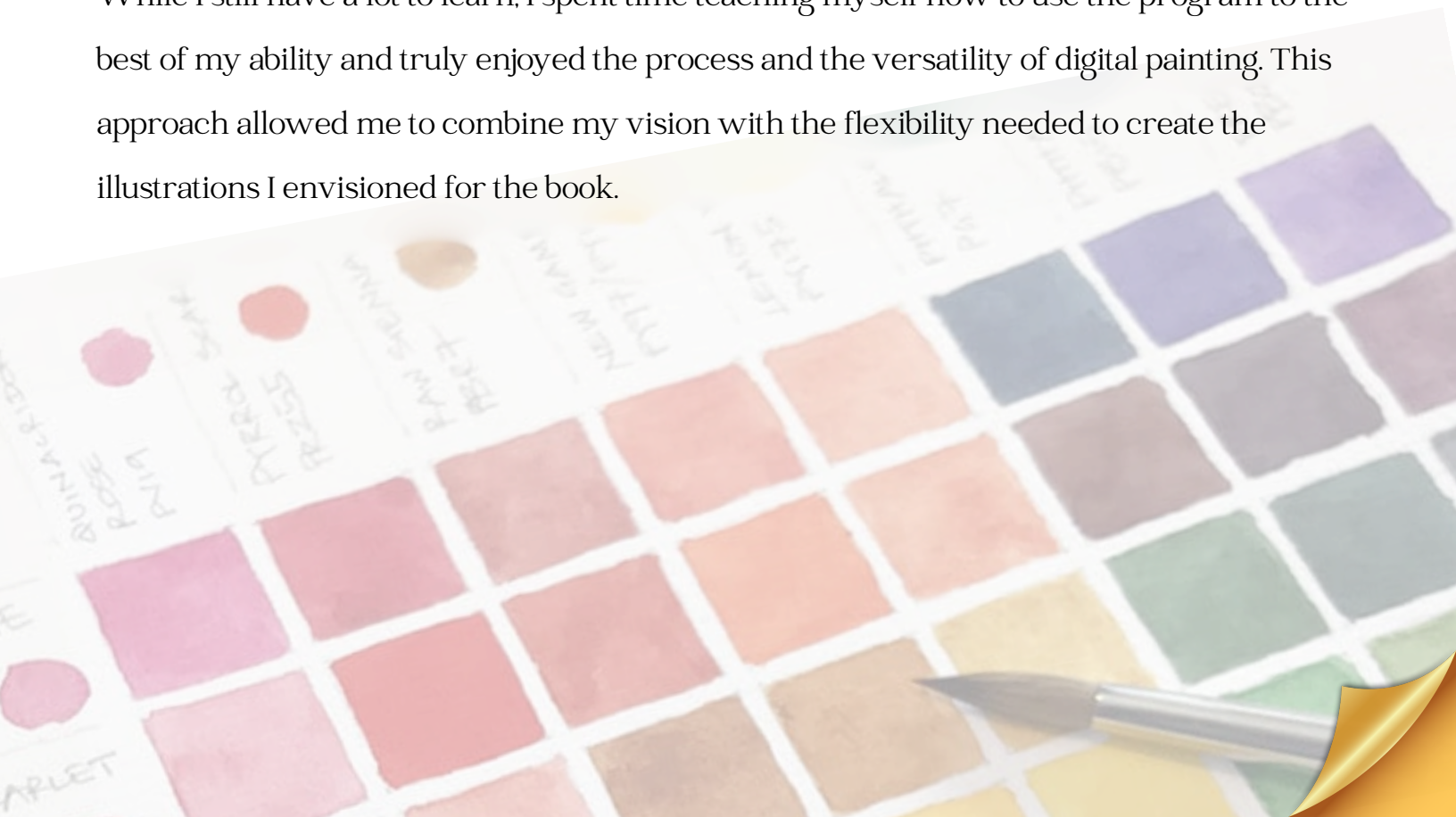
I invested a significant amount of time watching YouTube videos and reading articles to educate myself on how to write a children's book. I lost count of the hours of research I undertook before even writing the first lines of the book. The process was rigorous but incredibly enlightening. I learned that there is considerable math involved in choosing a page size and that downloadable templates help calculate margins to account for bleed lines, a term I had not heard of before this project. For picture books aimed at children ages 3-8, the word count typically ranges between 500-1000 words, and there are generally 32 pages in a children's book. It's embarrassing to admit, but even after reading children's literature daily for the past twenty years, I hadn't recognized that there is typically standard number of pages. I also learned that most authors hire illustrators and allow a minimum of six months for the illustrations to be completed. This only scratches the surface of the information I gained during my research.

I found myself working tirelessly on the book once my children were asleep, continuing well into the early hours of the morning. I set a goal of starting and completing the book in six weeks and accepted that my sleep would be minimal during this period. While I look back at the book as it is now and reflect on some small changes I would like to make, overall, I am proud of the finished product.

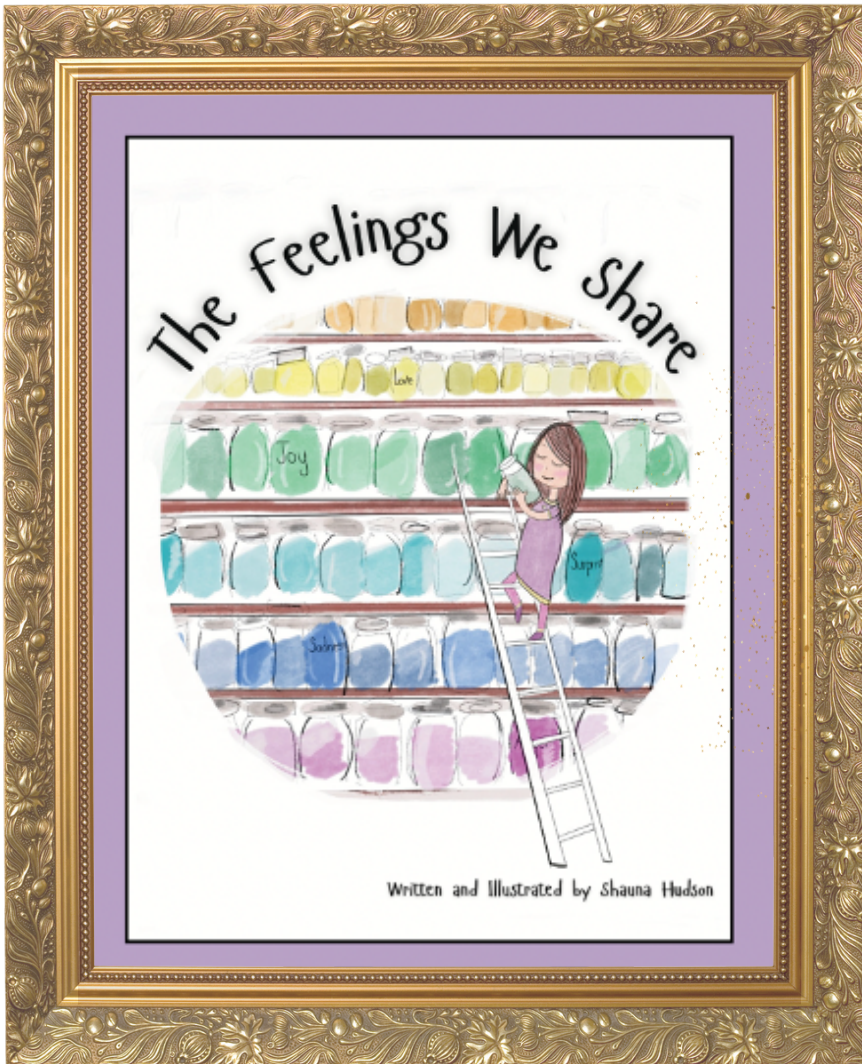
Creating Meaning Through Art

The images in the 'The Feelings We Share' were critical. I once read that picture book illustrations are like a "buy one get one free" deal, as they not only enhance and complement the text but also open the door to a range of perspectives and connections. It was essential that I create the illustrations myself, even though I am nowhere near being a polished artist. I believed my unique touch would enhance the text in a way only I could achieve.

Although AI can generate stunning images, I wanted the aesthetic and the project to be entirely my creation, from the heart. Initially, I planned to draw and watercolour the images. I purchased all the necessary supplies but soon realized that this method would be incredibly time-consuming and offered little room for error. I wanted the flexibility to make changes, which watercolor didn't allow, even though I loved the aesthetic. Ultimately, I decided to purchase Procreate, a graphics editor app for digital painting. While I still have a lot to learn, I spent time teaching myself how to use the program to the best of my ability and truly enjoyed the process and the versatility of digital painting. This approach allowed me to combine my vision with the flexibility needed to create the illustrations I envisioned for the book.



The Rationale Behind The Feelings We Share'

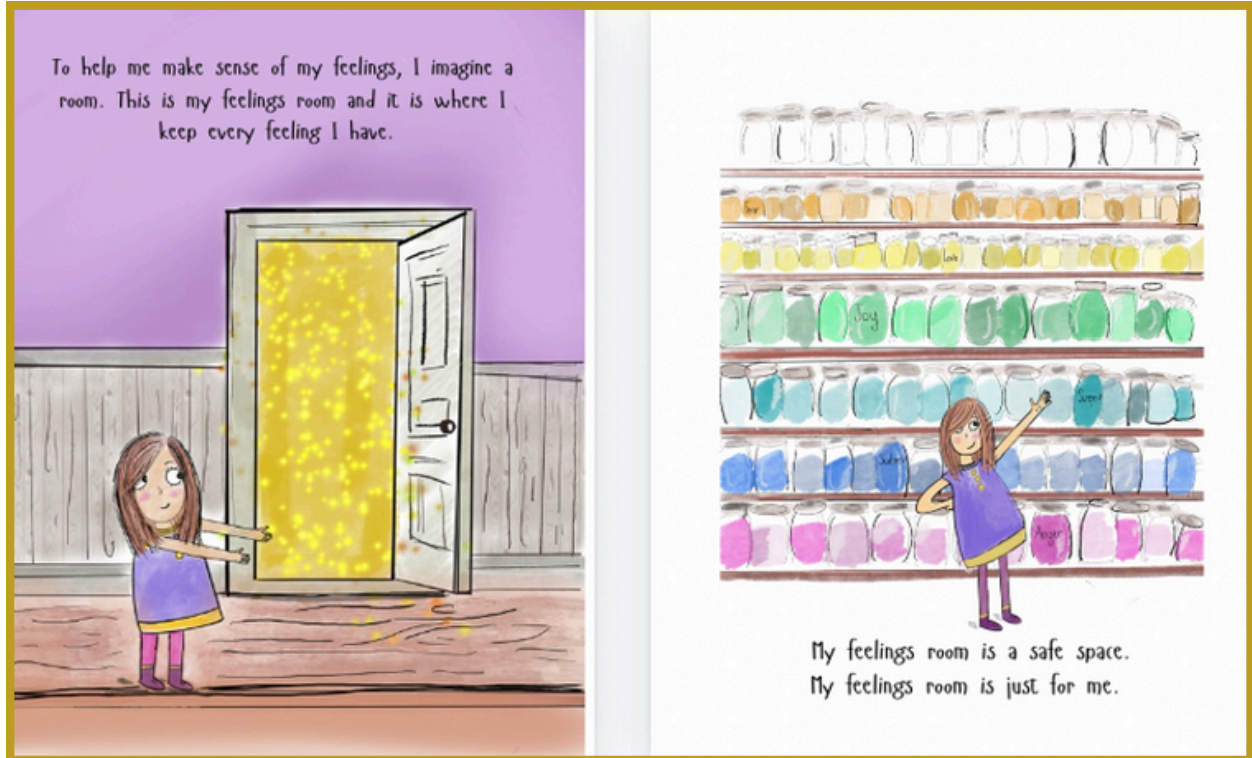


I chose "The Feelings We Share" as the title because it subtly suggests that we all experience similar emotions at different times. Even when we feel alone in our emotions, it's important to normalize them and remember that feeling a range of emotions is part of the human experience. The colourful jars of feelings on the cover represent the seemingly endless range of emotions that we might encounter. I don't believe in assigning specific colors to feelings as different colors subjectively evoke different feelings for different people. However, I found the rainbow of colours not only aesthetically pleasing but also symbolic of the expansive variety of emotions we experience.



(Pages 2–3)

The story begins with the main character, aesthetically based on my own daughters, holding a balloon but showing some resistance. Accompanied by the text "I can feel a lot of different things," the balloon symbolizes the various emotions we carry within ourselves daily. Whether we realize it or not, these emotions accompany us wherever we go, as they are an integral part of us. I chose to start the narrative by normalizing a range of emotions and bringing awareness to readers of all ages, that all feelings are acceptable and a normal part of the human condition. The balloon represents the idea that emotions do not necessarily weigh us down, even though we carry them with us.



(Pages 4-5)

Initially, I was hesitant to assign feelings to a room because I didn't want to imply that emotions should be locked away or contained. However, after extensive thought, I decided to use the room to convey the notions of safety around feelings and to emphasize that they are uniquely one's own, controlled by the individual experiencing them. This approach combines the idea of a secure space for emotions with the understanding that we have autonomy over our feelings.



(Pages 6–7)

As I planned the narrative for "The Feelings We Share," I felt a strong urge to create an interactive text. My goal was to engage the reader with vivid images and meaningful content, fostering a sense of belonging and connection between the text and the audience. By inviting the reader to close their eyes and picture their feelings room, they are encouraged to participate in the storytelling while practicing mindfulness.

On the following page, the main character, intentionally left nameless to allow the reader to see themselves in them, is made aware that certain feelings can be complex and confusing. The character struggles to arrange these emotions on canvas. In contrast, she finds that some feelings are simple to identify when they arise. At this point in the story, I would invite readers to see if they can identify how the character feels in the bottom two images of the page. I will intentionally prompt several students to answer, anticipating a range of responses to demonstrate that we can encounter similar situations but experience them very differently. I aim to highlight to children that it is okay to feel differently from others, and that all emotions are valid.



(Pages 8–9)

I chose to create simple images to correspond with simple text, conveying profound meanings. The “wave” of emotions is a phrase often used by adults but less commonly with children. I wanted to depict an individual being overwhelmed by emotion and when employing the book for group teaching, use group discussions to explore coping strategies for these situations. This scenario is a common experience for humans, and learning to navigate it with healthy coping mechanisms is crucial. Educators can also use this image to remind students that feelings come and go like waves, when we let them. When waves of emotions visit us, instead of trying to stop them, we ride the wave of emotion by accepting and noticing it and reminding ourselves that emotions will not stay with us forever.

The next image shows a contrast, revealing the main character taking control of her feelings and choosing to face fear with bravery. The diving board scenario is a frequently given example in early primary grades when students discuss times they felt brave. As addressed in the previous chapter, the research shows that students' ability to relate to the text, reinforces and encourages positive social behaviors being explored.



(Pages 10–11)

The image of the main character attempting to shove her emotions into a sack, only to have them explode, emphasizes the idea that when individuals suppress their true emotions without addressing them, those emotions are likely to grow and eventually “erupt.” The core message of this story is the importance of acknowledging and identifying our feelings. Suppressing our true emotions can lead to somatic stress, which is harmful in the long run. I chose this image to convey this concept in a way that is accessible to young learners.

The next image showcases the idea that when we pretend to feel something we do not, our authentic selves will always shine through. The main character spritzing joy over the dog, who is clearly displeased, illustrates the concept that true emotions cannot be disguised as something else. This scene is meant to teach children that genuine feelings are always evident, no matter how much we try to cover them up. An important fact to point out is that allowing ourselves to feel what we are feeling, rather than ignoring or covering it up, helps us move forward through the feeling instead of getting stuck in it.



(Pages 12–13)

As the main character sits on a grassy hill accompanied by her peer, she conveys the importance of opening up to the safe people in our lives and releasing emotions that may be bottled up. The message here is that while not everyone deserves to hear our stories, it is a beautiful gift when we find others who make us feel safe enough to share our truths. Sharing openly and authentically can be healing, allowing others to meet us with empathy. It also strengthens connections, as communicating what we need helps others understand how to support us. As Brene Brown famously states, “Clear is kind.” We are being kind to ourselves when we are clearly asking for what we need, and we are showing kindness to others by choosing to trust them with our stories.

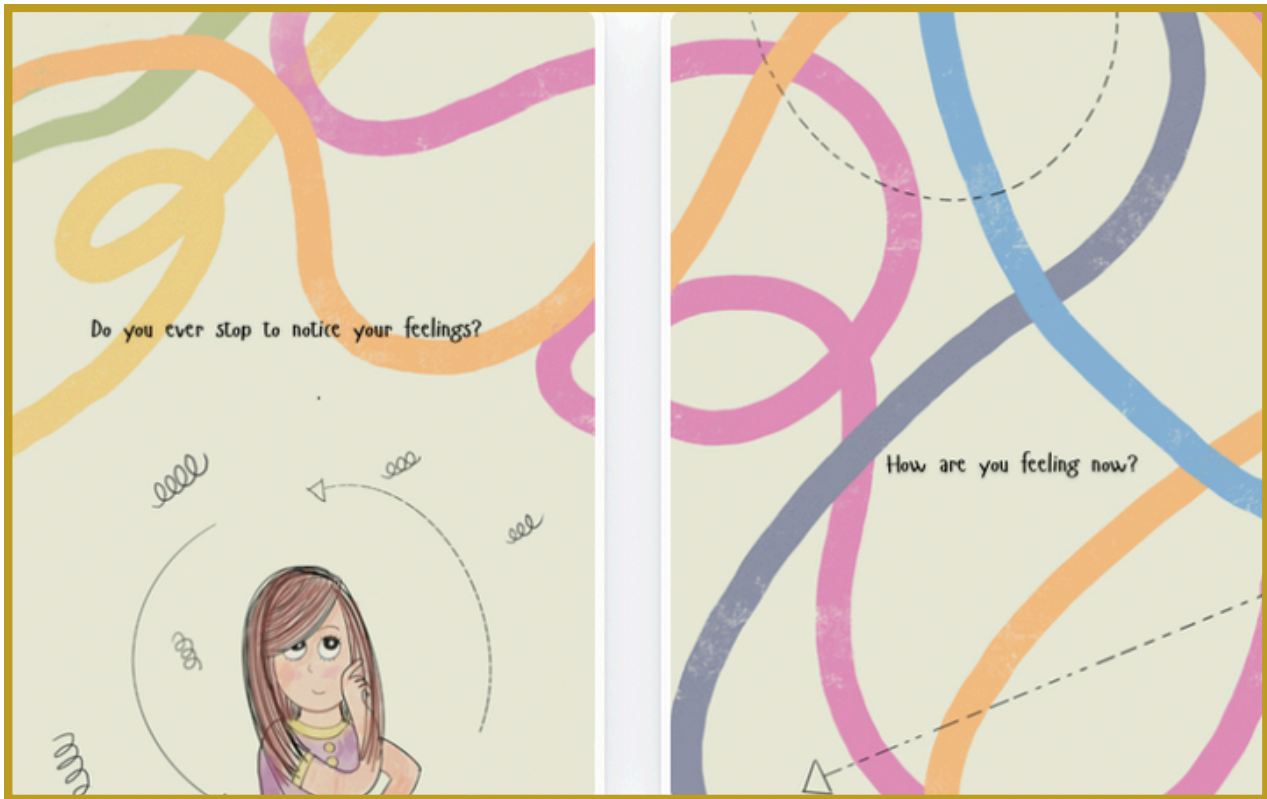
The next page reflects scenarios that I am confident many of my students have encountered, such as being frustrated by a peer who displays impulsivity or shows no remorse for behaviour that has negatively impacted them. Often, students tend to respond by “erupting” in these situations, particularly at the early primary levels. However, the main character models the ability to stay regulated and ask for a break to process what has just occurred. Further group discussions around what can happen upon the main characters’ return would be incredibly beneficial for learners to openly discuss, helping them think about how to apply these strategies the next time they find themselves in similar situations.



(Pages 14–15)

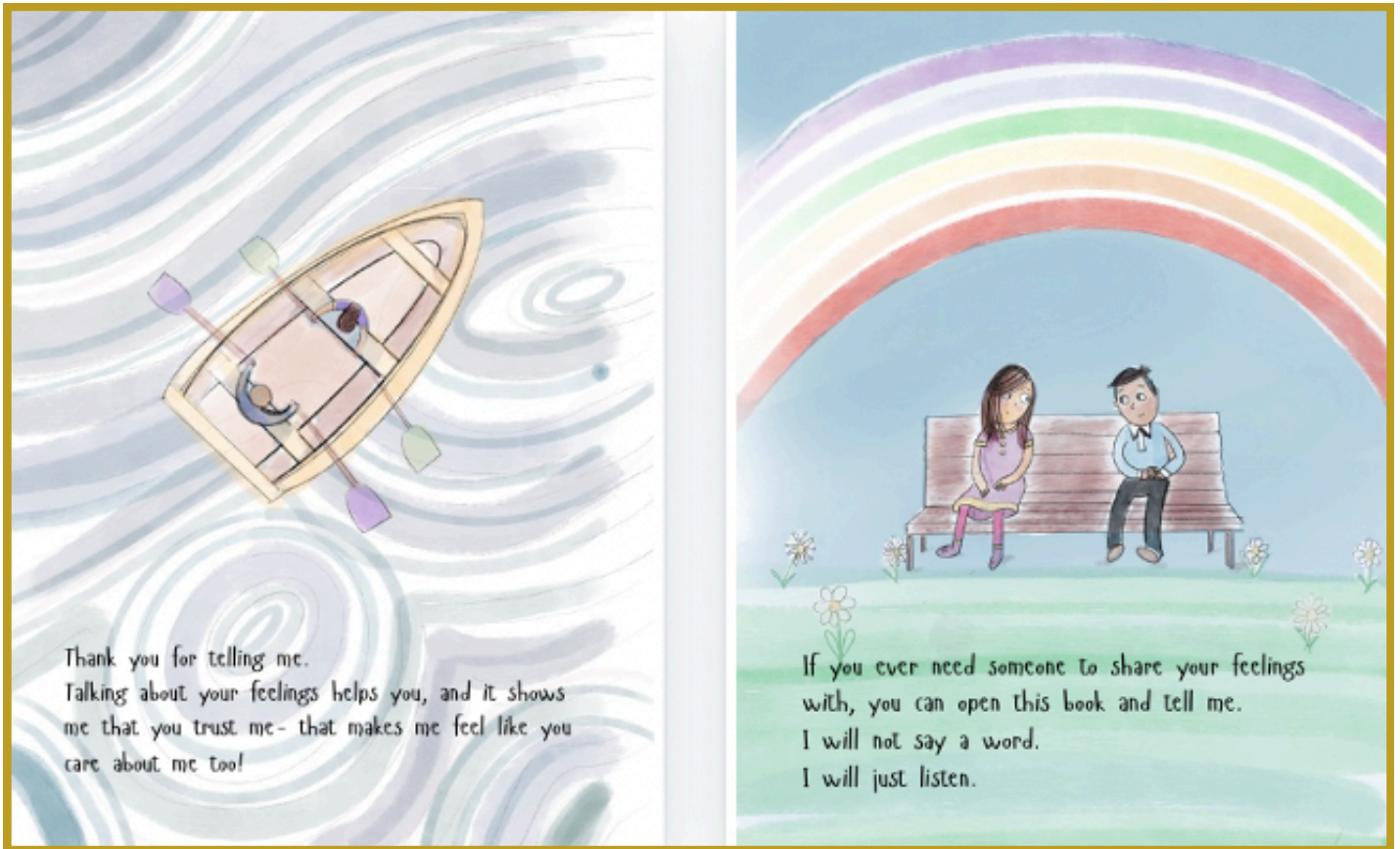
Noticing feelings is the foundation of this book, and the image of the main character feeling nervous about sharing in front of her classmates is a common scenario that resonates with many students. The message on this page is to convey that while the main character may continue to feel nervous as she presents, simply noticing and non-judgmentally labelling the emotion allows her to gain some sense of ownership and control over it. This approach helps to mitigate the emotion's intensity.

The following page suggests that, regardless of how we feel at times, our emotions are meant to serve us. There is value in difficult feelings. This page can offer opportunities for discussions about anxiety and the fight, flight, or freeze response, and how these reactions can serve us by helping us make informed decisions, solve problems, stay alert, and be aware of risks. The artwork in the image depicts a positive embrace and acceptance of all emotions, emphasizing the importance of understanding and appreciating our full emotional spectrum.



(Pages 16–17)

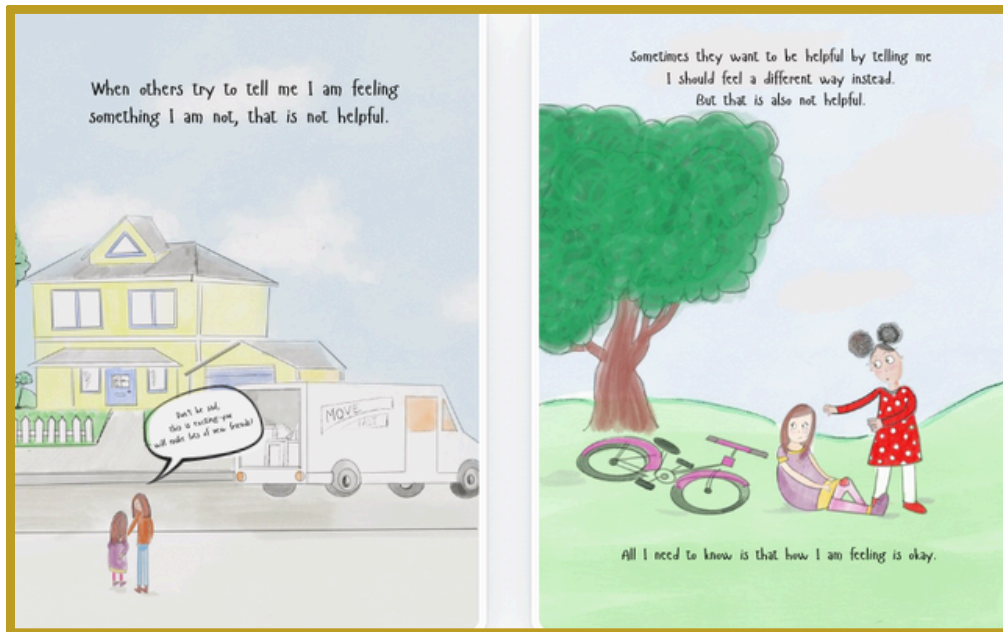
At this midway point in the story, the main character draws the readers back in, checking for engagement and asking learners to assess their own emotional states in real-time. This page promotes practicing emotional self-awareness and feeling identification. Teachers can use this as a check-in point to see if there is anything students may want to open up about or to simply encourage SEL-based internal dialogue. Teachers need to emphasize the significance of students' capacity to emotionally check in with themselves throughout the day. This practice allows students the opportunity to potentially ask for support or make necessary changes that will positively impact their moods and circumstances.



(Pages 18-19)

After encouraging students to share their emotions with their teachers and peers, I wanted to follow up by reinforcing the importance of this skill with pages that depict its practice. The illustration of friends in a boat on the open sea symbolizes their unique sense of trust and care for one another. This setting, away from the busyness of everyday life highlights their connection with one another and emphasizes that sharing feelings helps us on an emotional level but also strengthens our bonds with others.

The image of two friends sitting and sharing on a bench depicts the main character connecting with a peer while inviting the reader to share their feelings if they need to. The main point I wanted to stress on this page was intended for adults: the lines, "I will not say a word. I will just listen," serve as a reminder that it isn't always an adult's responsibility to rescue children, or anyone for that matter, from their feelings. Simply listening allows children to feel seen and heard. This validation is often not only what children truly want, but what they need.



(Pages 20–21)

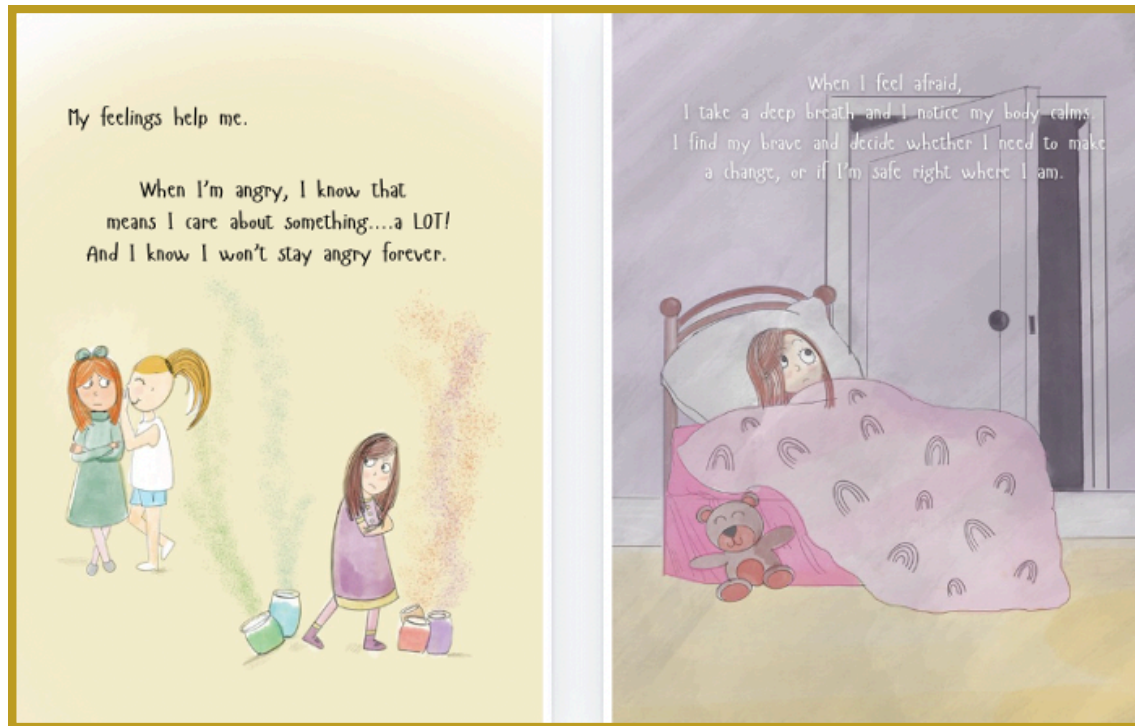
I wanted to continue the theme of validation through these two images. In the first picture, the adult, well-intentioned in her attempt to convince the main character to dismiss her sadness, suggests that a move to a new location will bring about exciting change. As an educator and a parent, I have witnessed numerous accounts of adults invalidating children's feelings in an attempt to rescue them from their discomfort, or in some cases, their own. I too have been guilty of responding in this way.

The first person to read "The Feelings We Share" was my sister. She was in a hurry to get her children to their next activity and was quickly reading through the book, however, I noticed she had paused on page 20 and suddenly began to cry. She calmly looked up at me and said, "I didn't realize this before, but I'm constantly trying to talk the kids out of their feelings. I do this ALL the time!" Rather than comfort my sister, I reacted with joy. This was exactly the type of response I had hoped to elicit from at least one reader. I intended to spark self-reflection and it was astounding to observe this level of intended impact on its very first reader.

Additionally, when I shared the book with my aunt, she sent me the following message: "I've received your wonderful new book and just read it. I cried. We weren't allowed to express our emotions when we grew up, and this is an exceptional way to educate children and adults like me. I'm so impressed by the artistry, your knowledge, and your delivery. Thank you for creating this beautiful book!" The sense of relief I get from feedback like this is immeasurable. Knowing that the intended messaging can impact both children and adults is incredibly rewarding.



Ensuring that children understand their feelings are valid, is essential for their emotional development. When adults acknowledge and affirm a child's emotions, it fosters a sense of security and self-worth, allowing them to feel understood and valued. This acceptance encourages children to identify and embrace their feelings rather than hide them due to confusion, shame, or fear of being judged. Validating their emotions helps promote open communication and teaches children to manage their feelings effectively, leading to increased resilience and emotional intelligence. By demonstrating that all emotions are natural and acceptable, adults help lay the foundation for healthy relationships and enhanced self-esteem.



(Pages 22–23)

A quote I came across years ago that has profoundly impacted me, both as an educator and as a deeply feeling individual, is "Anger is sadness with nowhere to go." Hearing this was transformative, shaping how I respond to students and my own family when they experience intense anger. Often, the intensity of their anger seemed disproportionate to the situation, but this perspective helped me understand that underlying pain or sadness was likely driving their behaviour. In the first image above, the main character experiences anger because she isn't included, a natural human desire that is often heightened during early developmental stages. Her anger stems from the pain of exclusion because of the deep care she has for her friends.

The next image provides a group discussion opportunity to discuss anxiety openly. Modelling for children how to have internal conversations before reacting is crucial. In this image, the main character feels unsafe as she sleeps alone in a dark room and peers into her closet. She needs to decide whether to seek help or, by identifying her fear, intercept its impact on her and recognize that she is, in fact, safe. This understanding allows her to acknowledge fear or anxiety and process and work through it without letting it control her.



(Pages 24–25)

An important sentiment I wanted to address is that the prickly feelings we all experience will not last forever. Disappointment, for example, is a naturally occurring part of life, and accepting rather than resisting it builds distress tolerance and resilience. I chose to emphasize an unexpected change in plans, as this is a scenario that through several group discussions, my students have often shared, can be especially difficult to process. While challenging for all learners, a change in routine or the occurrence of an unexpected event can be particularly jarring for neurodiverse individuals. Being flexible can be difficult for children in general and understanding that life doesn't always go according to plan is crucial. The overarching theme of page 24 is that it is okay to feel the pain attached to disappointment, as long as we also recognize that the wave of feelings that overtake us at times, will not stay forever, and ultimately, we will be okay.

I couldn't resist using the image of slime to represent the stretching of distress tolerance on page 25. Through the use of one of my student's favourite materials, this visual metaphor illustrates how our tolerance can grow with each struggle we encounter and frustration can be managed and transformed into a more adaptable and resilient state.



(Page 26)

For some children, entering social settings can feel overwhelming and even unsafe. When children have difficulty adjusting to new people or environments, there's often an underlying assumption that something is 'wrong' with them for feeling this way. As a parent of a child who takes time to warm up to new individuals and spaces, I found myself questioning my parenting and my child's emotional wellness. However, through educating myself about attachment theory and anxiety, I learned that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' temperaments—some children simply operate differently.

I've witnessed parents pushing their children into new situations when they weren't comfortable, concerned that others might view them as different if they weren't happily engaging with others. Pushing children when they are not ready can cause them to retreat further. Understanding a child's personality and allowing them to feel that it is okay to need time to acclimate to a new situation is crucial. There is no 'right' way to be social. Observing an environment before jumping into it might be exactly what a child needs to feel confident and safe, and that is okay.

Once I began reflecting as a parent, on the notion of children needing time to adjust to new settings, I noticed that by validating my own child and letting her know it was okay to need time to feel comfortable, I noticed the process of her becoming comfortable sped up. In this image, I wanted to normalize needing time and space to feel comfortable. While connection with others is important, it needs to feel right for the child and it is crucial they feel ready to safely engage.

When I feel disgust, I learn more about what feels right and what doesn't feel right...for me!

(Page 27)



Through this image, I aimed to emphasize the importance of respecting others' preferences as well as being kind to ourselves in accepting what we like and dislike without feeling the need to change to fit in. Self-awareness, individuality and inclusion are the key sentiments of this page. The lines "When I feel disgust, I learn more about what feels right and what doesn't feel right...for me!" highlights the individuality of each person.

By emphasizing the word "me" at the end, I wanted to educate students about the notion that it is perfectly okay to have unique preferences that differ from others. Feeling disgust is a personal and unique experience that helps us understand our boundaries and preferences, it teaches us about our likes and dislikes, guiding us toward what makes us most comfortable and what does not. By recognizing and respecting these feelings, we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, reinforcing the sentiment that it's okay to have different tastes and responses from others. Self-awareness is crucial for making choices that align with our true selves and fostering authenticity.

In using this book during class discussions, I plan to delve deeply into the concept of disgust, encouraging students to explore examples beyond just foods. We will examine how different smells, colours, and other sensory experiences can evoke feelings of disgust. By discussing these ranging examples, my aim is to foster a broader understanding of how individual preferences and reactions can differ significantly. This discussion will serve as a foundation for promoting inclusivity, helping students recognize and respect the diverse perspectives and preferences of their peers. Through these discussions, students will learn to appreciate that what feels right or wrong to one person may not be the same for another, emphasizing the importance of empathy and acceptance in building a supportive and inclusive classroom environment.



(Pages 28–29)

In the first image, I wanted to emphasize the importance of bravery, pride, and confidence as these are an integral component of a child's emotional development. Confidence is essential for children as it empowers them to face new challenges and fosters resilience. When children act bravely, they take risks to share their true selves, whether it's a talent, a thought, or a feeling. The notion that all of us have gifting that can sometimes be buried by insecurity is a reality. In leaning into bravery, I wanted to share with students that this can open the door for them to be authentic to who they are. Feeling proud of our what we can accomplish, can reinforce a positive self-image, and contribute to a student's sense of self-worth.

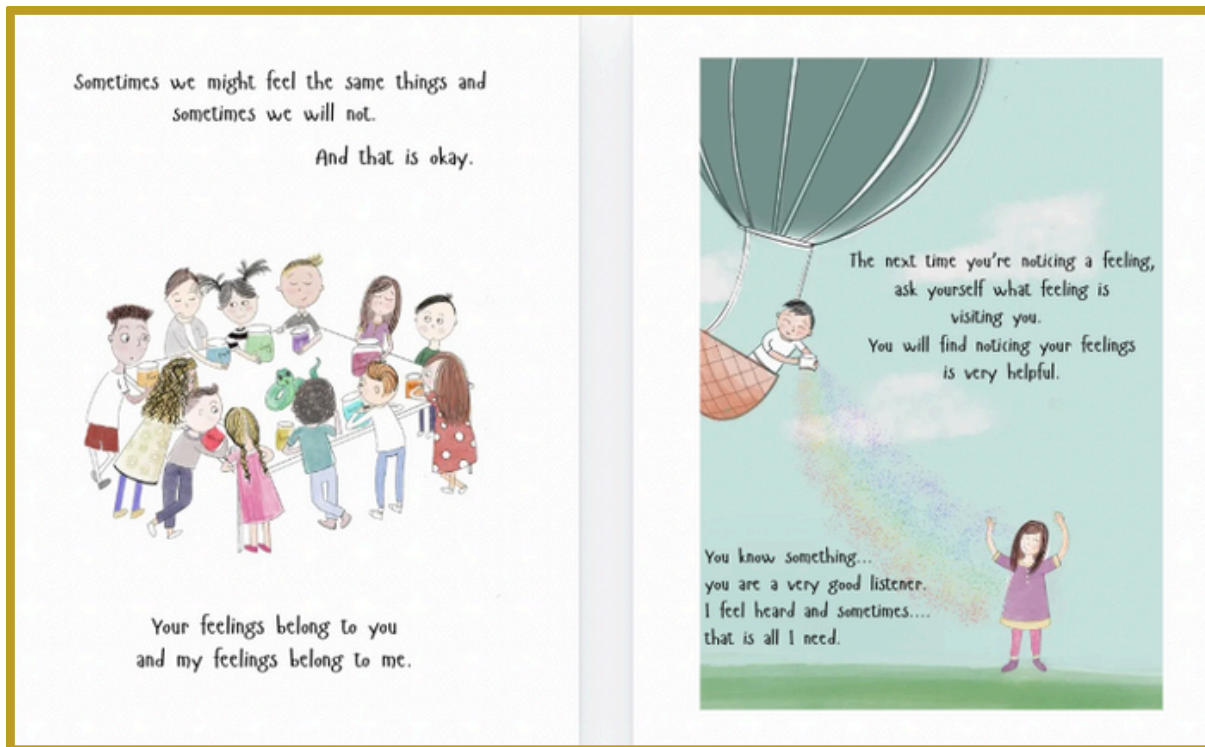
The message on page twenty-nine emphasizes the interconnectedness of confidence, leadership, helpfulness, control, calmness, and self-awareness. When children feel confident, they are more likely to take on leadership roles, which fosters a sense of responsibility. Being helpful enhances their sense of control, reducing anxiety and promoting calmness. A calm state is optimal for learning, making children more receptive to new information. I wanted to emphasize yet again the recognition of feelings, encouraging children to notice them they are not calm as emotional awareness is crucial for emotional regulation, allowing them to settle and feel safe.



(Pages 30–31)

Including a sense of loss in the story was important to me because grief and loss are inevitable and universal human experiences, hence I chose to tell the story of grief through the image of the main character losing a beloved pet. In conversations with fellow educators, I've found that addressing feelings of grief and loss delicately can be challenging and often time, uncomfortable. As nurturers of children, we tend to feel tremendous pressure to 'not get it wrong' when discussing loss. While there are several factors to consider, my approach to supporting children who have experienced loss is direct but with compassion and love. Normalizing the experience of difficult emotions is crucial, as it is both healthy and necessary. As mentioned earlier in this story, these feelings won't last forever. Writing this part of the narrative reminded me of a perspective on grief that brought me significant clarity in terms of making sense of the emotion: grief is like a stone we carry in our pocket. We notice and feel it sometimes, but as time goes on, the stone doesn't get smaller; instead, we become stronger and more capable of carrying it, making it feel lighter. As a counsellor, I would use my judgement when deciding whether this analogy is appropriate or not given the maturity and circumstances of the learners I am using it with.

Page 31 revisits the idea that we all have a range of emotions within us. Even if we're not ready to confront them immediately, it is important to eventually acknowledge and process them to make sense of and work through our feelings.



(Pages 32–33)

For the final two pages, I wanted to highlight the key themes: all feelings are valid and recognizing them is essential for emotional regulation and overall wellness. In the illustration where children are gathered around a table, I included a snake, as snakes often evoke a wide range of emotions. Each child is holding a jar that symbolizes their emotional response to the snake, whether it be joy, disgust, nervousness, fear, love, etc. When reading this page with students, I would encourage them to share how they might feel in that scenario, emphasizing the similarities and differences in their reactions and the importance of respecting how we may respond differently in the same experience, as well as normalizing the notion that all emotions are okay.

On the final page of the story, I aimed to conclude the story with a joyful image. The depiction of two friends connected by their emotions is meant to relay the delight in this act of sharing feelings between friends.

Discussion Questions for teachers, counsellors, families...or anyone with feelings!

1. What are feelings and emotions? Which ones can you identify?
2. Does everyone experience a range of emotions?
3. How can you tell when someone is feeling a certain way? Can you always be sure you know how someone else is feeling?
4. What helps you when you are experiencing BIG feelings?
5. How can you help someone else who is feeling overwhelmed by their emotions?
6. Has anyone ever told you that you should feel differently from how you were feeling? How did that make you feel?
7. Can you relate to any of the situations that were illustrated in the book?
8. Do you notice there are certain feelings that you experience more than others? What might those be?
9. Some feelings and emotions are harder to experience than others, but why might they still be important?
10. Has there ever been a time when you have not been able to tell how you were feeling?
11. If you need someone to talk to, who are the safe people you can go to?
12. Is there a feeling you wish you felt more or less often- what might need to change in order to make that happen?
13. How are you feeling right now?

All feelings are valid and it's common to experience a range of emotions. Talking about how you feel when you are ready to is a wonderful way to stay calm, connected and in control.

Shauna

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

When we can identify our emotions we become more aware of our feelings. Awareness helps us understand and manage feelings more effectively.

COMMUNICATION

Knowing the different names of emotions helps us communicate how we are feeling to others. This can help us seek support, resolve conflict and express ourselves more clearly.

EMPATHY

Understanding our emotions helps us recognize and empathize with the emotions of others. This helps support healthy social interactions and stronger relationships.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

By naming our emotions, we learn to identify triggers and develop strategies to cope with big feelings.

PROBLEM SOLVING

When we can better understand what we are feeling, we can better understand the reasons behind the emotions. This can help us find constructive ways to address the root of the emotion.

CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Being able to express emotions give us a sense of control over our experiences, which can boost confidence and self-esteem.

Why does teaching children to name their emotions matter?

NAMING EMOTIONS HELPS WITH

(Pages 34–35)

The concluding pages of the book are designed to offer thoughtful discussion questions tailored for teachers, counsellors, and families, encouraging reflection upon the story's themes and lessons. Educators might find it beneficial to introduce some of these questions before the reading begins, allowing students to consider them as they engage with the narrative. After the story is completed, revisiting these questions can provide insights into any new perspectives or observations students have developed regarding emotional intelligence.

Additionally, the final page delves into the psychological importance of recognizing and understanding our feelings. It emphasizes why being aware of our emotions is crucial for personal growth and effective emotional regulation. This segment aims to deepen the reader's understanding of emotional awareness and its impact on children's daily lives.

Conclusion

The integration of SEL literature in elementary classrooms presents a transformative approach to education, developing not only academic success but also emotional intelligence and classroom regulation. The review of various studies highlights the impact SEL-themed children's books have on students' social and emotional progress. By providing narratives that model empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, SEL literature is a powerful tool in helping young learners navigate their emotions and interactions and foster emotional intelligence.

The research suggests that SEL literature contributes significantly to creating a positive classroom environment. Students exposed to SEL-themed stories exhibit improved behaviour, enhanced emotional regulation, and stronger relationships with peers and teachers. These benefits extend beyond the classroom, as students carry these essential skills into their homes and communities, promoting enhanced empathy and connection.

Implementing SEL literature in the curriculum requires a thoughtful selection of books that reflect diverse experiences and a range of emotions. Educators play a critical role in guiding discussions and activities that reinforce the lessons from these stories, ensuring that students can relate the narratives to their own experiences. By prioritizing SEL in early education, schools can build the foundation for lifelong emotional well-being and academic achievement.

As educators, counsellors and administrators recognize the importance of emotional intelligence, the integration of SEL-themed children's books becomes a pivotal strategy in nurturing well-rounded, resilient, and empathetic learners. Embracing this approach ensures overall student wellness, where academic and emotional learning are seamlessly connected, benefiting students and the broader community.

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