

Hidden Children: Using Children's Literature to Develop Understanding and Empathy
Toward Children of Incarcerated Parents

by

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Abstract

Research indicates that children whose parents are incarcerated are a vulnerable group of people with poor life outcomes. Yet these children are not tracked in the Canadian system, making it difficult for schools to respond with appropriate supports. How can schools be inclusive to this hidden demographic of children? Framed in theories of Critical Literacy and Ethic of Care, the author proposes the use of story to develop understanding and empathy. Research shows that acknowledging these children's experiences through story helps them to feel validated while broadening capacity for empathy among other children. Can a story develop empathy toward children of incarcerated parents? To answer this question, the author wrote a picture book about a child who visits her mother in jail, and read the story to three groups of children, interspersed and followed by rich discussions. The story elicited empathetic responses from all students, suggesting the benefits of this approach.

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Prologue

“Grandma, I don’t want to visit Mom tomorrow,” said Sammy as she shuffled, barefoot, into the kitchen of their tiny apartment.

Her Grandma stood, bent over a pot on the stove, stirring the vegetable soup she’d made from scratch. She stroked Sammy’s hair. “But you were looking forward to wearing your butterfly dress, remember? Better have some soup so you can get to bed early.”

“Ok,” sighed Sammy as she sat down and stared at the bowl of soup that Grandma placed in front of her. Earlier that afternoon she’d watched Grandma shred potatoes, carrots, and beets for the soup. Now, as the delicious smells and rich colours blended together, she couldn’t tell the vegetables apart.

Eating Grandma’s soup always made Sammy feel better. “It’s yummy,” she said as she emptied her bowl.

“That’s because it’s ‘stone soup,’ like the story your mom read to you last time,” teased Grandma, trying to cheer up her granddaughter.

“Hmm,” mumbled Sammy, smiling slightly.

When Sammy woke up the next morning, she hardly touched her breakfast. The first Sunday of the month used to be her favourite day and one she looked forward to all month, but today she felt sad. She pulled the faded orange and green dress over her head, feeling the fabric folds of fluttering butterflies settle over her skin.

“Let’s go, Sammy. Your mom is looking forward to seeing you.”

“I’m coming,” said Sammy as she plodded to the door.

Sammy and Grandma crossed the street, and stood waiting for the bus when a monarch butterfly spread its wings and settled down on a bench beside them. Sammy's face brightened up.

"Grandma, look at the butterfly! Let's catch it. It could be a present for Mom."

"It's beautiful," said Grandma, "but catching a butterfly would make your mother sad. Did you know it has already spent a lot of its life in the dark? It lived in a cramped cage called a chrysalis. While it was in this dark and lonely place, it was becoming a beautiful butterfly. Now it is free. Shouldn't we help it stay that way?"

Sammy bent down to look more closely at the butterfly. As she absorbed its delicate, brightly coloured orange wings, with their black, ink-like markings, she began to chant:

Butterfly, butterfly,
Whence do you come?

"I know not, I ask not,
Nor ever had a home."

Butterfly, butterfly,
Where do you go?

"Where the sun shines,
And where the buds grow."

Sammy's mother had read this poem to her many times during their Sunday visits. She loved the sound of the words and often chanted the lines when she was by herself. Suddenly the butterfly caught a breeze and Sammy watched it lift and fly away.

Sunday was a day filled with waiting. When the long bus ride was over, they waited for a taxi because the bus didn't take them as far as they needed to go. It was lunchtime and they were hungry, so while they waited, Grandma and Sammy ate the tuna sandwiches that Grandma had made. Since tuna was Sammy's favourite, Grandma picked it up whenever it was available at the local food bank.

When she finished her sandwich, Sammy clasped her thumbs together, unfurling and fluttering the rest of her fingers to imitate a butterfly. She swayed her arms back and forth as she continued to chant the verse:

“I know not, I ask not,
Nor ever had a home.”

It was Grandma’s turn to look sad. “A good home is important,” said Grandma, putting her arm around her granddaughter. “I hope I am giving you a good home, Sammy.”

Sammy gave her grandma a hug. She knew she had the best grandma in the world, but she missed her mom.

When her mother had been taken away, Sammy had cried every night, counting, always counting the days till the next visit. But the last little while had been different; sometimes she didn’t want to go visit her mother. Each visit meant she would have to say goodbye again. Her feelings were so mixed up, kind of like the ingredients in Grandma’s soup; it was hard to tell one ingredient from the other as the soup simmered in a single pot.

When the taxi arrived, they climbed into the back seat, and the driver drove down the familiar road lined with hemlock and cedar trees. At last the car stopped in front of the towering chain-link fence of the Cedar Lake Women’s Correctional Centre.

Chapter One: Introduction

There are many children in Manitoba schools who, like Sammy, have a parent or parents serving time in correctional facilities. These children face many obstacles, such as poverty, academic difficulties, and social and emotional stresses. Oftentimes, especially in the case of maternal incarceration where the mothers have been the primary caregivers, children are required to relocate and change schools (Bayes, 2007; Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2010). A move might be difficult for a child in the best of circumstances, but while coping with the temporary loss of a parent for reasons usually cloaked in shame, a move is an example of one of many challenges faced by young children of offenders. When children of offenders suffer socially and emotionally, they may exhibit behavioral patterns that can range from emotional and violent outbursts to withdrawing and turning inward. These children may also be victims of bullying (Morgan, Leeson, Dillon, Wirgman, & Needham, 2014). Without support, the challenges that children of offenders face can be overwhelming and even insurmountable. Yet, these children remain part of an unidentified demographic across Canada. How can children be supported if we don't know who they are? And how can schools help to meet their needs? These are questions I want to explore. I want to explore some of the realities that children of incarcerated parents live with so as to develop a better understanding of some of their daily challenges. And then I want to explore the function of inclusive literature in today's classroom and the role it might play to help students develop in their awareness and empathy toward children of incarcerated parents. Ultimately, the goal of developing empathy toward children of incarcerated parents is to help this demographic of marginalized children to feel less alone, more understood, and more included. The question I will set out to explore is: Does the reading and discussion of a picture book—that tells the story of a young girl

whose mother is incarcerated— help children to understand and be empathetic toward those affected by parental incarceration?

Understanding Manitoba's Correctional Landscape

To help children of incarcerated parents, we need an understanding of who their parents are—the women and men who comprise, in part, Manitoba's incarcerated population. We need some familiarity with the realities surrounding Manitoba's correctional demographic. The following points will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter. According to Statistics Canada (2012-2016):

- Manitoba's correctional facilities are overcrowded.
- Manitoba reports the highest per capita incarceration rates of all provinces in the country.
- Aboriginal peoples are disproportionately represented in correctional centres in Manitoba as well as in Canada's other provincial and territorial correctional centres.
- Mental illness, addiction, poverty, histories of abuse, and memories of childhood trauma are among some of the realities that many in our correctional institutes live with.
- Incarcerated women have, on average, more children than other women, and aboriginal women (both incarcerated and non-incarcerated) have, on average, more children than non-aboriginal mothers.
- A large percentage of currently incarcerated inmates have grown up in settings of familial incarceration. Children of offenders may have a higher probability of being incarcerated in adulthood than those of non-incarcerated parents.

- The majority of incarcerated men and women do not have high school diplomas.

These findings have significant implications for our schools, since—though children are not tracked—it appears that many students in Manitoba schools live with the reality of having a parent behind bars. Correctional statistics in Manitoba tell a dismal tale in a country that claims to honour the rights of children. These statistics play a profound role in shaping the lives of young children whose parents are serving time, and all too often, these children's lives become a sad sequel to the current narrative being played out in their parents' lives.

Children of Offenders: An Unidentified Demographic

Children of offenders are an unidentified demographic in Canada's provinces and territories. This presents a major obstacle for educators who may want to offer support to children who deal with parental incarceration. Unless the children themselves, or the families or caregivers of these children, choose to disclose such information, the schools have no way of knowing about the parental incarceration of their students. This information is neither tracked nor passed on to the schools by the Department of Justice, making it very difficult for schools to help these children deal with the issues they will face—issues that are unique to parental incarceration (McCormick, Millar, Paddock, & Cohen, 2014). Quoted in a blog post, McCormick, a criminology professor, stresses the importance of considering the well being of children when sentencing their parents:

When people are sentenced to custody, there is no protocol for considering whether they have dependent children and what effect the parent's sentence will have on the child. Yet, it is important to consider the best interests of a child because maintaining family relationships can be an extremely important

factor in reducing parents' chances of reoffending, as well as preventing a child's future anti-social behaviour. (Russell, 2014)

This is not to say that needs exhibited by children of offenders are never met. For example, if a child suffers academically, socially or in other noticeable or measurable ways, supports can and should be put in place to help children of offenders as they would for anyone else.

However, if parental incarceration is the underlying cause of an exhibited need, and teachers and support workers were to be aware of this, this knowledge could impact and change an intervention plan. A child struggling to write for example may be more motivated if an understanding support worker suggested she write a letter to her mom or dad in jail, or arranges for projects to be taken home so they can be shared during correctional visits. If correctional visits are only allowed on weekdays, a teacher should make allowances for necessary absenteeism and encourage such visits. To support children in this way, recognizing and working within their realities, children's experiences are normalized and they will feel less isolated (Morgan et al., 2014). The pain that children feel when a loved one is absent, the shame and guilt that is often associated with the separation, and the "family secret" they are sometimes expected to keep all have the potential to further stigmatize and isolate these children. It is not the child's fault when a parent is incarcerated, and yet isolation and stigmatization often adds to the suffering that such a child is already made to endure (Bayes, 2007).

In the interest of meeting the needs of the whole child, of offering support to children of incarcerated parents, it is important to know who these children are. If the courts were to share such pertinent information with the appropriate schools, then schools could use that information to offer meaningful support to the children affected by the absence of their

parents. There are a number of examples around the world (e.g., in the UK, Australia, USA) that politically recognize this vulnerable group of children with the purpose of offering more supports within the school community (McCormick et al., 2014). Although such policy changes could go a long way to benefit children of offenders in Manitoba, such a proposal is also well beyond the scope of this project. The current reality in Manitoba (and indeed in all Canadian provinces and territories) is that the decision to disclose parental incarceration rests with the child, parent and/or caregiver. This project has been confined to what can be done within the current structure of Canadian schools, where the disclosure of parental incarceration may or may not occur. How can teachers meet the unique needs of children of parental incarceration when these children are not identified as such?

The Power of Story

Bringing greater awareness, at the school and classroom level, of the lived experiences of children of parental incarceration is a first step in recognizing the realities that these children live with. According to Maich and Belcher (2012), “Peer awareness can be thought of as the foundation to inclusion in the classroom, paving the way for further direct interventions and opportunities” (p. 207). Such recognition has the potential, says Lea (2015) to help children in the margins feel less isolated. Picture books have the ability to deliver on that front as they can be used to support and nurture peer awareness (Maich & Belcher, 2012). Even in addressing sensitive topics such as stress and child abuse, Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) speak to the importance of children’s literature. They write, “Children benefit greatly from reading literature that reflects authentic situations in life, situations they can relate to” (p. 335). They go on to add, “We want the messages to be healthy and authentic; to give abused children hope; and to help other children understand people and

their situations; and as children get older to encourage them to be advocates for others” (p. 336). The weaving of a narrative has the potential to bring awareness to a concept in a way that a mere delivery of facts fails to do. By endowing an idea with a human face, feelings and human interactions—as is often the case in picture books—potential is created to help children grow not only in knowledge, but also in empathy and in social imagination, touching not only the mind, but also the heart. Say Lysaker and Sedberry (2015), “...it is the deep empathetic response and engagement in social imagination that creates a new relational context within a reading event that can promote learning and personal transformation” (p. 106).

It is important not to lose sight of the whole child in the choosing and delivery of reading materials that support the growth of emotional intelligence and the development of empathy. Reading stories to children is an effective way to broaden their experiences, while helping them to change perspectives and grow in empathy. “Extensive and intensive engagement with good literary texts through adult-mediated reading can encourage children’s empathy development, which is healthy for individuals” (Riquelme & Montero, 2013, p. 236).

For children of offenders to feel less isolated, their experiences need to be understood more widely by others. Well-told stories have the potential to cultivate understanding and empathy in other children, who may never have thought about the impact of incarceration on children. Stories can powerfully shape the way we think, and picture books have the additional visual component that can aid children in developing greater understanding. Picture books are simple and effective tools that teachers have at their disposal to shape young minds.

Stories also provide a safe environment for children to learn and to enjoy vicarious experiences while exploring the world of feelings and allowing empathy a chance to take root

and develop. Safety is an essential component in a healthy classroom community, and as Sapon-Shevin (1999) reminds us, such “safety cannot be mandated; it must be created” (p. 37). Reading stories to children is an excellent way to create a safe space for children. Stories that focus on *another* have the potential to help children of incarceration to feel safe and less vulnerable. While it is important that the story character parallels some of the difficulties experienced by the child of incarceration, the use of story also deflects attention off of the self and helps to create a comfortable distance for these children. Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) speak to the importance of such separation. Though they speak specifically about stress and child abuse, this principle might be generalized to other difficult life situations such as learning to cope with challenges associated with parental incarceration. Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson argue:

Sometimes, when the abuse is separated from the child’s life and is happening to someone else, for example the characters in a children’s book, the topic may be discussed more easily between adults and children, and children may be more apt to talk about what is happening in their lives. (p. 337)

Stories can be an effective instructional strategy to promote peer awareness, as they have the ability to provide not only a creative outlet, but also a sensitive avenue in that picture books telling the story of *another* might prevent a teacher from inadvertently inflicting more shame and unwanted attention than children of the incarcerated may already suffer.

Stories have been used effectively to help children learn about a whole array of human conditions, such as: autism, race, sexual orientation, and poverty. Such stories help children learn about people both like and unlike themselves, and can help to develop greater understanding and empathy. For example, in a research project involving three groups of

grade two children (70 in total), Dever, Sorenson, and Brodrick (2005) used picture books “as a vehicle to teach young children about social justice” (p. 18). *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting is a story about a homeless father who lives at an airport with his young son because he cannot afford to pay rent. This story evoked empathetic responses when it was read to the groups of children; many “were saddened and decried that it is not fair that some people are homeless” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 20). *Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch is a story of a young girl who loved to act and hoped for the role of Peter Pan in their class production. “Grace’s classmates tell her that she can not play Peter Pan in the play because she is a girl and she is black” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 19). Saddened but not dissuaded, her practice paid off and she was finally rewarded with the role she had hoped for. Children in the research project “were not only empathetic, but were moved by this story to take action and advocate on Grace’s behalf” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 21).

When children read stories about children like themselves (Miller, D., 2012)—characters that they can relate to—it helps them to connect with literature, and it normalizes experiences that can otherwise be very isolating (Lea, 2015). Acknowledging children’s experiences with creativity, integrity, and sensitivity has the potential to help children of incarceration feel less alone and more understood, essential components for healthy child development (Lowe, 2009).

It is equally important for children whose experiences are quite different from those of the fictional character to read such stories so that their perspectives are given a chance to change and grow. Stories of troubled lives have been used to broaden the world of those who may have no understanding of, or given little thought to an issue. Also known as inclusive literature, stories about children with disabilities have been used effectively to help others

develop understanding and empathy toward children who have disabilities. Picture books are a wonderful way to enlarge a child's experience, and in so doing, develop empathy. In bringing a human face to the difficult topic of incarceration, and in telling a story in an age appropriate way, we as educators have a wonderful opportunity to help children enter into the experience of others. For empathy to have a chance to take root and develop, children's perspectives need to be challenged. For example, viewpoints may unknowingly be based on fear and misinformation; a child's perspective about prison could well be shaped by images and messages seen in the mass media. Images of dangerous offenders may come to mind, even though in reality, this particular demographic is relatively small. (According to Statistics Canada, 2010/2011, 76% of provincial and territorial sentenced offenses are of non-violent nature). If this same child reads a story about a little girl who misses her mother, a mother who regularly reads stories to her, the fact that she is serving a prison sentence may be seen in another light, because now the reader has a better chance of relating to this domestic and comfortable scene. There is still tension in this story to be sure, but there is enough familiarity in place for the reader to begin to form new perspectives. With new perspectives, hopefully students will "begin challenging stereotypes and misconceptions" (Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013, p. 313).

Does a picture book help children to understand and be empathetic toward those affected by parental incarceration? This is the question I want to explore. When new perspectives give readers greater understanding and empathy, then children of incarcerated parents may open up, and trusting, caring relationships between children of offenders and other children may start to form. If stories have the potential to help children become more empathetic, as Lysaker and Sedberry (2015), Nikolajeva (2013), Maich and Belcher (2012)

claim, then sensitively told stories about incarceration have the potential to help children become more empathetic toward those who are impacted by parental incarceration. The hope of course would be that such understanding would lead to greater social inclusion, so that children of incarcerated parents might feel less isolated. To feel understood and socially included could be an important first step toward helping children of offenders to be successful in school. Inclusionary practice is important for these children; it is their parents after all, and not these children, who have been incarcerated, and they should not be “punished” by feelings of isolation. Healthy beginnings and success in school will reduce chances of future incarceration and increase the possibilities that children of incarcerated parents will live productive and meaningful lives.

Sammy's Visit is a realistic story about a day in the life of a child with an incarcerated parent. Sammy lives with her grandmother, who struggles to afford life's essentials. Lonely and missing her mother, Sammy struggles emotionally. She feels intimidated by the prison walls and is resentful that this barricade separates her from the most important person in her life. The ache that sets in after each prison visit is becoming unbearable, and consequently Sammy begins to resist these visits. Yet, she loves her mother and values the intimate reading moments together, qualities that many children can relate to. If this story has the potential to develop understanding, empathy, and a new perspective toward children whose parents are incarcerated, then such stories have a place in Canadian schools.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Does a picture book help children to understand and be empathetic toward those affected by parental incarceration? In an effort to answer this question, I will begin by situating children of offenders, and will do this by offering background information of the lives of offenders themselves. Correctional statistics—in so far as they offer a glimpse into how a child of an offender is impacted—will be explored. Because children of offenders are a politically unrecognized group in Canada, teachers cannot be assured that they will know whether these children—who are at risk—will be in their classrooms. Helping other children develop an awareness, understanding, and empathy of the daily reality that children of incarcerated parents live with, is an approach that may help children of offenders overcome their sense of isolation. Finally, I will examine the use of inclusive literature and its effectiveness in helping those in the margins to feel more understood by their peers.

Theoretical Underpinnings

When we as teachers and school personnel practice caring for the students in our charge, we help to make schools safe and nurturing places and we foster environments that will meet the needs of the whole child. Children bring their backgrounds with them when they come to school. The families they come from, and the social and emotional burdens they carry, will affect their interactions and performance at school. Teachers need to respond to students with compassion by showing interest in and caring for them. This includes flexibility with and broadening subject areas so as to meet the needs and interests of the whole child (Noddings, 2005). To do so is not to ignore the educational mandate that teachers are entrusted with. On the contrary: “To have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, and loveable people is not anti-intellectual. Rather, it demonstrates respect

for the full range of human talents” (Noddings, 1995, p. 2). Caring for our students includes creating opportunities that help to give voice to difficult experiences they may face, experiences that otherwise may leave students suffering from feelings of isolation.

I draw on The Ethic of Care theory developed in the 1980s by feminist Nell Noddings. Emerging out of Kant’s traditional ethics of duty, this relatively young theory “differs dramatically from traditional ethics,” Noddings argues (1988, p. 219). While “Kant insisted that only those acts performed out of duty...should be labeled moral, an ethic of caring prefers acts done out of love....Acting out of caring, one calls on a sense of duty...only when love or inclination fails” (Noddings, 1988, p. 219). What Noddings promotes is a highly relational ethic, as it takes the responses and feelings of others into account. This sets her apart from Kant. The relational element is the primary difference between how she and Kant view ethics: “A supremely lonely and heroic ethical agent marks both Kantian ethics and the age of individualism. An ethic of caring returns us to...the relations in which we all must live. A relational ethic is rooted in...natural caring” (Noddings, 1988, p. 219).

Part of developing and cultivating environments of care involves teaching students to care for one another. Teachers do this by role modeling attitudes and behaviors of care, but we must also actively teach children to care for each other. Noddings addresses the importance of this: “In a classroom dedicated to caring, students are encouraged to support each other; opportunities for peer interaction are provided, and the quality of that interaction is as important (to both teacher and students) as the academic outcomes” (Noddings, 1988, p. 223).

This study is also situated within a Critical Literacy framework. Critical Literacy has grown out of Paulo Friere’s philosophy of social justice and his active work among oppressed

communities in Brazil, which he wrote about extensively in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Like Noddings, Freire speaks to the importance of dialogue. He wants to ensure that those who are marginalized are part of dialogues that will impact them. To dialogue with others, one needs to be caring and loving. “Love,” says Freire (1970) “is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself....if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue” (p. 70–71). He goes on to say that “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking” (Freire, p. 73). Freire compares the education system to a banking model, void of human emotion, and he suggests that critical thinking is neither evident nor valued in our schools. Luke (2012) summarizes Freire’s ideas and concerns well:

He argued that schooling was based on a ‘banking model’ of education where learners’ lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant. He advocated a dialogical approach to literacy based on principles of reciprocal exchange. These would critique and transform binary relationships of oppressed and oppressor, teacher and learner. (p. 5)

Freire’s life work was devoted to empowering those who were disempowered, oppressed, and marginalized. Today, Freire’s vision continues to guide critical literacy theory as it focuses “on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities” (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

Critical literacy has been defined in many ways. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) have reviewed and synthesized these definitions grouping them into the following four dimensions: “(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382). They point out that these dimensions are interrelated and none of them stand-alone. The goal

of the first dimension: ‘disrupting the commonplace’ is to explore a text with a new perspective, or in the words of Lewison et al. (2002), “seeing the ‘everyday’ through new lenses” (p. 383). The second dimension: ‘interrogating multiple viewpoints’ asks us “to imagine standing in the shoes of others—to understand experience and texts from our own perspectives and the viewpoints of others and to consider these various perspectives concurrently” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). The third dimension of critical literacy: ‘focusing on sociopolitical issues’ considers power relationships and explores how “sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). Finally, the fourth dimension of critical literacy: ‘taking action and promoting social justice’ focuses not merely on action, but on *reflective* action. Students are encouraged to think critically about inequity and to find concrete ways to bring about change toward greater social justice.

Caring for others involves knowing and understanding others. Taking the time to know our students helps to build trust with them. In fact, it is *easier* to care for others when we understand them and are able to see things from their perspectives. Friere and Noddings both speak about the importance of caring for and knowing our students. Freire speaks to the importance of “...understanding learners’ life worlds, with the aim of framing and solving real problems” (Luke, 2012, p. 5). It is significant that Freire’s book is entitled, “Pedagogy *of* the Oppressed” and not, “Pedagogy *for* the Oppressed” because it indicates that he actively involved learners in the process of learning. Says Noddings, “Teacher and student must know each other well enough for trust to develop” (1988, p. 223). For teachers to help children of offenders, we must understand who they are and where they come from. “To shape such persons, teachers need not only intellectual capabilities but also a fund of knowledge about

the particular persons with whom they are working” (Noddings, 1988, p. 221). Collecting this “fund of knowledge” about our students involves knowing and understanding our students and the realities that children of incarceration typically live with, and this involves having a rudimentary understanding of who their parents are and the circumstances surrounding their parents while incarcerated.

Manitoba Correctional Statistics

Incarceration Rates. Manitoba reports the highest incarceration rate of all Canadian provinces (See Appendix A). Statistics Canada (2012) reports that the provincial and territorial average rate of incarceration is 90 per 100,000 adults. Manitoba’s rates are more than double the provincial/territorial average; this prairie province incarcerates 213 people per 100,000 adult citizens. Saskatchewan falls only slightly behind Manitoba (190 incarcerated per 100,000 adults), but barring Saskatchewan, there is a huge gap between the numbers of people Manitoba incarcerates per capita compared to incarceration rates in the other provinces (Dauvergne, 2012). Overcrowding in provincial correctional centres has reached an all time high. Manitoba’s Auditor General’s report (2014) documents a growth of 16 percent in the province’s adult custody population during the 15-year period of 1990/91–2004/05. During the following 8-year period (2004/05–2012/13), his report reflects a growth increase of 111% (Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba, 2014, p. 245). It was during this 8-year period that Prime Minister Harper was elected (2006), and the federal government “implemented a host of legislative and policy changes designed to ‘tackle crime’” (Comack, Fabre, & Burgher, 2015, p. 1). Harper’s Tough on Crime legislation has been largely blamed for the sudden increase in incarceration numbers, and it has come under attack for many reasons. According to Comack, Fabre, and Burgher (2015), the strategy was a “one-size-fits-all

approach” (p.28), an ideology-based approach, lacking in evidence that crime was effectively reduced.

Statistics Canada reports that crime rates in Canada have been steadily dropping since the 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2016). Though the crime rates have fallen, correctional centres across the country and particularly in Manitoba continue to be dangerously overcrowded. Since the Tough on Crime legislation over the past decade, convicted criminals have been given longer sentences and have had to serve greater portions of their sentences before being granted parole eligibility (Comack et al., 2015). This may explain in part why the prison population has grown despite the decrease in crime. The remand population refers to people who have been arrested and are held in custody, even though they have not been convicted. It is widely reported that a growing remand population also contributes significantly to the growth inside correctional facilities. For example, Statistics Canada reports, “For the last 10 years, the remand population has consistently exceeded the sentenced population for all provinces and territories. Adults in remand accounted for 54% of the custodial population in 2013/2014” (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Aboriginal Peoples: Disproportionate Representation. Aboriginal peoples are disproportionately represented in Canada’s provincial and territorial correctional centres. While aboriginal adults make up only about 13% of Manitoba’s adult population, they make up 70% of Manitoba’s inmate population (see Appendix B). The numbers are even more disproportional for women. While Aboriginal women make up only 3% of the general population, they represent 36% of incarcerated women in provincial and territorial correctional centres (Statistics Canada, 2015).

According to the Public Services Foundation of Canada (2015), a national research and advocacy organization, “The over-representation of Aboriginal people in Canada’s correctional system has been the subject of international condemnation” (p. 48). In a United Nations report on Indigenous peoples of Canada, Anaya (2014) addresses many “dire social and economic circumstances” affecting Aboriginal peoples in Canada, such as “high levels of poverty, the historical context of residential schools, and systemic racism” (p. 9). He goes on to say:

Given these dire social and economic circumstances, it may not come as a surprise that, although indigenous people comprise around 4 per cent of the Canadian population, they make up 25% of the prison population. This proportion appears to be increasing. Aboriginal women, at 33% of the total female inmate population, are even more disproportionately incarcerated than indigenous individuals generally and have been the fastest growing population in federal prisons. (Anaya, 2014, p. 11)

Mental Illness, Addiction, Abuse, and Poverty. Mental illness, addiction, living with histories of physical and sexual abuse, and poverty are among other common characteristics prevalent in Canada’s inmate population. In his 2011–2012 report Howard Sapers, the correctional investigator of Canada, documents the high number of inmates who live with mental illness. The document reports that 13% of male inmates and 29% of women were identified at admission as presenting mental health problems. A slightly higher percentage had previously been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons. The number of inmates afflicted with mental illness however appear to be much higher: 62% of offenders entering a federal penitentiary are ‘flagged’ as requiring a follow-up mental health assessment or service

(Sapers, 2012). The correctional investigator also reports on the complexity of mental illness in the prison demographic, “Offenders diagnosed with a mental illness are typically afflicted by more than one disorder, often a substance abuse problem, which affects 4 out of 5 offenders in federal custody” (Sapers, 2012, p. 6–7). Sapers (2012) reports that “50% of federally sentenced women self report histories of self harm, over half identify a current or previous addiction to drugs, 85% report a history of physical abuse and 68% experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives” (p. 6–7). In another report published by the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003), 80% of federally sentenced women prisoners reported prior physical and/or sexual abuse, and among those women, most were Aboriginal: “...in that population, aboriginal women offenders made up a disproportionate share of the abused; 90% of aboriginal women in prison reported having been physically abused” (2003, p. 6). It must be noted that these reports are based on data collected on federally incarcerated Canadians, and do not take provincial numbers into account. It is difficult to find data on provincial incarceration. A document published by the Public Services Foundation of Canada (2015) explains: Compared to the research that is conducted in the federal correctional system, there is “far less research conducted on inmates with mental health problems in the provincial systems. This serious knowledge gap is most concerning, especially since the provincial systems house significantly higher numbers of inmates struggling with mental health or addictions problems” (p. 44).

British Columbia appears to be paying more attention to the problem of mental health in Corrections than other Canadian provinces, as according to the government website, they are “the only province in Canada that has a dedicated Director of Mental Health Services as part of its correctional system” (British Columbia Ministry of Justice, 2013). According to the

Ministry of Justice in British Columbia, “more than half of BC’s offenders (56%) admitted into the corrections system are believed to have a substance abuse and/or mental illness disorder” (British Columbia, Ministry of Justice, 2013).

In *Discipline & Punish*, a historical analysis of the modern prison, Foucault (1977) explains that we have merely replaced the medieval practice of torturing the body as a means of punishment to that of torturing the soul:

If the penalty in its most severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body, on what does it lay hold? The answer of the theoreticians—those who, about 1760, opened up a new period that is not yet at an end—is simple, almost obvious. It seems to be contained in the question itself: since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. The expiation that once rained down on upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations. (p. 16)

Solitary confinement arguably does just that, and putting people with mental illness into segregation has proven to have fatal consequences. Despite the high numbers of inmates suffering from mental illness, solitary confinement continues to be used as a way to deal with infractions within Canada’s correctional centres. This practice has been condemned by Canada’s correctional watchdog, Howard Sapers: “As my office’s recent review of prison suicides documented, segregation was found to be an independent factor that elevated the risk of inmate suicide... In fact, 14 of 30 prison suicides between 2011-2014 took place in a segregation cell. Nearly all of these inmates had known mental health issues” (Kirkup, 2016, Prison Watchdog, paragraphs 6,7).

High rates of unemployment and poverty also mark the lives of many inmates. In a

research paper series, Statistics Canada (2005) explores crime patterns across the country. A possible explanation for the high rate of incarceration that is seen in the prairie provinces “compared to other parts of Canada is the fact that these provinces are home to a larger proportion of Aboriginal people, and as La Prairie (2002) explains, a group of Aboriginal people who have higher levels of social disadvantage than Aboriginal people in other parts of the country” (Pottie Bunge, Johnson, & Balde, 2005, p. 43). Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Regina are reported to “have inner city areas where the Aboriginal population comprises 25% or more of the total population. Examining the proportions of Aboriginal people who live in very poor areas in these cities, La Prairie (2002) found that 41% of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg...live in very poor inner city areas, 3 to 4 times the percentage of non-Aboriginals” (Bunge et al., 2005, p. 44).

Incarcerated Women Have More Children. The actual size of the group whose parent or parents are incarcerated is unknown since “official statistics on the numbers of incarcerated adults with children under the age of 18 have never been routinely collected in Canada” (McCormick et al., 2014, p. 15). Cunningham and Baker offer an estimate, “Each year at least 25,000 children across Canada have a mother in prison” (Cunningham & Baker, 2004, p. 1). This number does not include children of incarcerated fathers, and as women represent only 15% of adults in provincial and territorial correctional services, while men represent 85% (Statistics Canada, 2015, Males Account for Majority, paragraph 2), the numbers of children affected by parental incarceration must be significantly higher than 25,000.

There is some research to suggest that inmates, particularly female inmates, have more children than non-inmates. According to the executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society in

British Columbia, “studies in the US, Canada, and the UK all report that a significant proportion of prisoners have children. Female prisoners have more children than other women, and their incarceration has huge implications for them” (Bayes, 2007, p. 11). The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003) reports that two thirds of women admitted into federal custody are mothers (p. 6). As the majority of females admitted into federal custody are in their twenties and thirties—younger for aboriginal women—it is safe to assume that the majority of their children are minors. Inmates in general may have more children, but the difference is even starker for aboriginal women as “they are not only more likely than the rest of the Canadian female population to have children, but also to have a greater number of children” says McCormick et al., quoting the Solicitor General of Canada of 1996 (McCormick et al., 2014, p. 16). Statistics Canada (2013) reports:

The Aboriginal population is growing much more rapidly than the general Canadian population. The average number of children born to Canadian women overall is about 1.7; the fertility rate for registered Aboriginal women is approximately 2.9 children, thus driving a rapid rate of population growth.

(Demographic Overview, paragraph 15)

Since the Aboriginal and the Correctional demographic have greater numbers of children than people in the rest of society, many children in Canada are consequently impacted by the imprisonment of their parents.

Familial Incarceration. “A disproportionate number of prisoners come from families where a parent (or other family members) has been incarcerated” (Bayes, 2007, p. 10). Says McCormick et al., “Although methodologically strong research is lacking, studies generally suggest that children with one or both parents who are incarcerated face increased risks for

anti-social or other delinquent behaviors, and future involvement with the criminal justice system” (McCormick et al., 2014, p. 11). A study conducted by Cunningham and Baker involving 40 incarcerated Canadian mothers looked at the impact of incarceration on their children. About half of the children had spent time in youth custody according to their mothers (Cunningham & Baker, 2003, p. 39). Research suggests that children of offenders have a higher probability of being incarcerated in adulthood than those of non-incarcerated parents. Murray and Farrington (2005), whose longitudinal study followed over 400 boys and their parents in London, England suggest that “imprisoning parents might *cause* (emphasis added) antisocial behavior and crime in the next generation, and hence contribute to the intergenerational transmission of offending” (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p. 1277).

Given the higher than average number of children inmates may have, Manitoba’s soaring incarceration numbers should be a matter of great concern to educators, as all indicators point to high numbers of students in Manitoba schools that live with the reality of having parents behind bars. Educators must address what can be done to help children of offenders from following similar paths that lead to jail. These children must be given extra emotional, social, and academic support, so that children of incarcerated parents are given every possible opportunity to succeed.

Incarceration and Education. The correlation between the incarcerated population and low levels of education is significant. Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) reports that approximately 65% of federal offenders test at a level lower than grade 8, and 82% test lower than grade 10 (Correctional Service of Canada, 2011). Considering the low levels of literacy, education and employability among the majority of inmates, it is not surprising that many inmates reoffend (Esperian, 2010).

“Recidivism is a return to criminal behavior after release, and the effectiveness of corrections is usually measured by *rates of recidivism*” (Esperian, 2010, p. 320). Research shows a significant correlation between recidivism and low levels of education.

According to a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of correctional education using recidivism as a measuring tool, an inmate “who has not attended correctional education programs during incarceration is approximately 3.7 times more likely to become a recidivist offender after released compared to the offenders in the group who attended a variety of correctional education programs during incarceration” (Nally, Lockwood, Knutson, & Ho, 2012, p. 69). In a Canadian study, the lives of 654 federal inmate students were followed for four years after their release. One of the researchers, Duguid says, “...we can now assert definitively what most of us knew intuitively all along: education works. By works we mean reducing recidivism and inhibiting a return to crime after release from prison” (Duguid, 1997, p. 153). Based on the strong relationship between illiteracy and recidivism, the “social and economic cost of offending can be reduced by Adult Basic Education” (Muirhead & Rhodes, 1998, p. 60).

Since the effectiveness of Corrections is measured by recidivism rates, and since the correlation between recidivism and the lack of education is strong, excellent education programs and delivery within Manitoba correctional centres are essential. But, as our crowded correctional institutes indicate, recidivism is a growing problem. With compelling evidence showing the efficacy of correctional education, one must ask what is actually being done educationally for the incarcerated citizens in the province of Manitoba.

In a case study (Plett-Reimer, 2014) of three Manitoba correctional centres, correctional educators in all three centres recognized recidivism as a regular occurrence. For

example, one of the correctional teachers had this to say: “Unfortunately that’s the bad part of the job, seeing them come back over and over....At first I was surprised [by offenders returning], but I’ve gotten used to it” (p. 7). All three educators spoke readily to the connection between recidivism and the lack of education. For example, one correctional educator said: “If you’re under educated...do you get into trouble? Usually....when you’ve got 10% of the population have their diploma level out of the people in here, it speaks to something.... I believe Education is the key to [reducing] recidivism. I do. I believe it really is” (Plett-Reimer, 2014, p.7).

Education is not prioritized within Corrections. All three correctional educators in Manitoba’s facilities expressed this in many ways. For example, one teacher said, “It’s not the priority. I mean, how many correctional officers are there and how many teachers?” (Plett-Reimer, 2014, p. 7). This teacher also spoke about the great lack of information among inmates as she noted a student’s comment: ““So you mean to say, if I had an education I could have a job?’... Yeah, I think it’s the key to reducing recidivism. I really do. It’s the one thing that opens the door” (Plett-Reimer, 2014, p. 7). Manitoba’s correctional facilities emphasize retributive models of justice over restorative and rehabilitative models of justice. The sparse attention given to education in Manitoba facilities is one example of this. Indeed, one facility equipped to house 458 inmates—though due to overcrowding, the numbers are much higher—hires only one teacher. This teacher does not teach diploma courses, but offers what has become an increasingly irrelevant and unrecognized GED diploma program.

General Education Diploma tests (GED) have their origins in the US military as Boesel explains, “The GED tests were developed for the Army during World War II, in part to enable veterans who had not finished high school to attend college...” (Boesel, 1998, p.

65). “Today” says Boesel, “it is difficult for holders of GED diplomas to get into the military...” (Boesel, 1998, p. 65). It should be noted that this was written nearly twenty years ago and presumably educational standards have continued to grow even more since then. Though it is still possible to write the GED tests in Manitoba, there are fewer GED testing sites than there were before the new Mature Student high school diploma program was implemented in 2003. A former teacher in an adult education centre in Winnipeg had this to say,

It still is possible to get a GED. Pretty much the only people in Manitoba using it though are the male correctional centres. It’s just not promoted anymore. If you go to an adult learning center and say you want to do your GED, they’re going to steer you right over to the mature student diploma. In 2003 the mature student program diploma came into being. So, since then it’s basically been a phase out of the GED. (Plett-Reimer, 2014, p. 11, 12)

The GED diploma is no longer seen to be equivalent to a high school diploma by leading institutions such as the University of Manitoba as seen on the askManitoba page of the university’s website: “We do not recognize the G.E.D. as equivalent to a high school diploma” (Retrieved from <http://umanitoba.intelliresponse.com>, 2013).

Another Manitoba correctional facility, which has lost the use of its gymnasium as it has been filled with bunk beds over the past 7 years to service the ever-growing inmate population, houses well over 200 inmates. A teacher services this facility a mere 2 days a week, touching base with students briefly during a weekly exchange to collect homework and give students more assignments. Students must work on their assignments alone in their cells. They are also required to pay for the courses they take. It is hard to imagine that adults, who

have been unsuccessful in school in the past, would have the self-motivation to pursue a high school education with the plethora of obstacles that they face in jail.

Providing supports and ensuring academic success for children of offenders while in the public school system will help keep this vulnerable demographic away from jail where there are fewer supports and where academic success remains illusive to the majority of inmates, both because it is more difficult to change life long patterns, but also because providing educational support is low on the priority list of our justice system. Our schools, however, are charged with the mandate of educating students from the ages of 5-18 in Manitoba. Knowing what we know about children of offenders, educators have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to provide both emotional and academic supports for these children, so that they will be successful in school and in life beyond school.

Canada's incarceration system and Canada's public schools are related in that most of this country's incarcerated citizens have also been in the school system at some point and in some capacity. As educators, we need to ask what we could have done to help those people who are currently serving time to have had better outcomes in their adult lives. In fact, it is crucial we reflect on this question, so that we can, with great care, intervene during the early stages of their children's lives, and offer more effective supports to this young generation than their parents may have received when they were children. Issues too broad to be given more attention here, but which should be of concern to educators, include questions such as: Have schools failed those who are currently serving time in our correctional facilities? What educational opportunities are incarcerated Canadians currently being given to better their life opportunities once released, and is it enough? What kind of supports would help children of incarcerated parents deal with their challenges so they do not go down the same path that their

parents have? We will direct our attention to this final question.

Children of Incarceration: An Unidentified Demographic

No one really knows how many children in Canada have parent(s) who are incarcerated, because their numbers are not tracked. However, Justkids, an initiative begun in 2011 by Elizabeth Fry Society in British Columbia and aimed at providing support to children with a parent or parents involved in the justice system, cites this statistic on its website: “On any given day, 45,000 Canadian kids have a parent in prison. Over the course of a year, 256,000 children experience what it's like to have a parent behind bars” (Elizabeth Fry Society, 2011).

According to Statistics Canada (2015), Manitoba continues to have the highest rate of incarceration in the country's provinces, incarcerating more than double the national average. Canada's population is 35,851,000. The rate of incarceration in Canada is 87 adults per 100,000 (Marcoux & Barghout, 2015). Using simple calculations, we can see that the daily average number of incarcerated people in Canada in 2015 is 31,190 adults. We do not know how many children are affected, but if we were to calculate, using the estimates that Elizabeth Fry of British Columbia have offered, then for 45,000 children to have a parent in prison, each incarcerated person in the country would have on average, 1.4–1.5 children. With Manitoba's incarceration rate at 243 adults per 100,000 (Marcoux & Barghout, 2015), the daily average incarcerated population in 2015 is 2,400 adults. Applying the Elizabeth Fry estimate ratio, the number of children in Manitoba affected on a daily basis by parental incarceration would be 3,600. The Elizabeth Fry Society has also estimated a yearly total of 256,000 children being affected. Again, using this figure in making a calculation, Manitoba's yearly affected population of children impacted by parental incarceration could be 20,520.

In fact “there is no systematic process in place to identify school children affected by parental incarceration” (McCormick et al., 2014, p. iv). Yet incarceration statistics in Manitoba tell a dismal story. Though there are no records telling us the number of children who have parents in custody, both the high rate of incarcerated adults in Manitoba together with the higher than average number of children that female offenders typically have, give us reason to think that a significant number of children registered in Manitoba schools, live with the reality of having parents behind bars.

Despite the high numbers of children affected by parental incarceration, awareness of what these children face has not seemed to come to our collective consciousness. There is an increasing awareness in schools on critical issues such as race, sexual orientation, poverty, and disabilities, and many schools work hard to alleviate associated hardships. Yet children of incarceration continue to suffer alone and in silence. Although there is a growing recognition that teachers can provide valuable support to children of incarceration, the authors of a study focusing particularly on teachers’ experiences with children of incarcerated parents, say they “could not locate a single study that has investigated teachers’ experiences with children with incarcerated parents” (Dallaire et al., 2010, p. 282). There is a great need for research that looks at the needs of these children, so that teachers have a better understanding of how to best support them.

Knowing who these children are is only a first step in supporting them. To help children of incarceration, it is not enough simply to know about their parent’s incarceration. This is well illustrated by an anecdote told by Noguera (2003) as he reflects on a tour he had at an elementary school in California. During the tour given by the assistant principal, a young boy, about 8 or 9 years of age passed them in the hall, causing the assistant principal to shake

his head. Referring to the boy, the administrator said: “There’s a prison cell in San Quentin waiting for him. His father is in prison; he’s got a brother and an uncle there too...it’s only a matter of time before he ends up there too” (p. 341). Noguera, surprised at the certainty with which the assistant principal spoke asked, “Given what you know about him, what is the school doing to prevent him from going to prison?” (p. 341). Noguera could tell by the administrator’s flustered response that such a thought had never occurred to him. The assistant principal did not think it was his responsibility to offer supports that might prevent the child from following a similar path to prison. In fact, the administrator was “preparing to put this child on an indefinite suspension from school” (p. 341). Dallaire et al. (2010) believe that schools have missed the opportunity to offer these children necessary academic supports: “Though success at school could offer these children another pathway towards a stable life, many children with incarcerated parents struggle academically” (p. 281). Their study, the first study to assess teachers’ expectations of children of incarceration reveals that awareness alone can in fact be *detrimental* to children’s academic progress, as teachers have lower expectations of children whose parents are incarcerated (Dallaire, et al., 2010, p.287). Awareness alone is not enough; knowledge of parental incarceration needs to be accompanied by appropriate training for teachers.

Teachers need tools to support children of incarceration. Yet such tools are hard to come by. McCormick et al. (2014) of British Columbia speaks to this:

There is virtually no systematic Canadian curriculum for teacher and early childhood educator’s professional development programs focusing on the specific risks and needs faced by children affected by parental incarceration.

Thus, even if teachers were aware that a student was affected by parental incarceration, they are likely unaware of how to best support them. (p. iv)

To know how to support them, we must try to understand how parental incarceration affects children. A British study exploring the needs of children of incarceration identifies the following negative effects: significant behavioral problems (including bullying other children and teachers), being bullied, loss of friends, and sporadic attendance. Negative effects identified by parents include: bed wetting, crying, needing lots of reassurance, worrying about people finding out, worrying about their parents, taking on responsibilities beyond their years (Morgan et al., 2014). The executive director of Elizabeth Fry in British Columbia, addresses struggles commonly faced by children of incarceration, which are important for those who work with such children to know. Separation anxiety is very common and is sometimes “expressed through isolating behaviors and sleep disorders as well as displays of aggression and excessive anger” (Bayes, 2007, p. 11). Other emotional problems these children experience include: “feelings of fear, abandonment, shame and guilt... an increased risk of lower academic performance, truancy, gang participation, and substance abuse” (Bayes, 2007, p. 11).

There are a limited number of studies that look at effects of parental incarceration on children. Most studies are small and few are longitudinal. Also, many authors agree that it is difficult to isolate other risk factors such as: abuse, poverty, limited education, and parental unemployment and addiction. One study however widely cited (and noted as one of the few) is Murray and Farrington’s longitudinal study of 2005. It is the first of its kind and follows the lives of 411 young boys until they reach the age of 32. Murray and Farrington’s study provides a lot of information regarding the effects of parental incarceration on children. They

address the complex problems that children of prisoners face, and also work hard to isolate the risk factor of separation due to incarceration. They demonstrate the unique risk that parental incarceration has on children: “Prisoners’ children are a highly vulnerable group with multiple risk factors for adverse outcomes. Parental imprisonment appears to affect children over and above separation experiences and associated risks” (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p. 1269). They found that boys who experienced separation due to parental incarceration have poorer life outcomes than those who are separated from their parents for other reasons (Murray & Farrington, 2005). They identify anti-social behavior as an area of particular concern: “It is clear that children with incarcerated parents are at increased risk for antisocial behavior compared with their peers” (Murray & Farrington, 2012, p. 193). The stigma associated with parental incarceration is a possible explanation for children’s antisocial behavior (Murray & Farrington, 2012).

Little is known about the impact of parental incarceration from the children’s point of view, but in a study conducted by Nesmith and Ruhland (2008), their perspectives are explored. They learned from the “voices of the children themselves...that many of them struggled with feelings of isolation, anger, disappointment, and worry both directly and indirectly about the incarceration” (p. 1127). Also noted in this study is the resiliency demonstrated by some of the children. Nesmith and Ruhland credit much of this to the external support these children received as indicated by this observation: “Some of the children had strong supportive people and resources to help them” (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008, p. 1127).

How can schools care for children who live with this daily reality? Bayes offers the following teaching strategies for teachers: Don’t ask about parent’s crime. Avoid treating the

child as victim. Avoid being over-protective. Promote social acceptance and inclusion. Draw on examples of adults who as children had imprisoned parents. Provide storybooks on the topic. Become familiar with prison policies that affect children. Encourage a child's confidence by assuring safety and non-judgmental attitude—e.g. 'it must be hard to have mom in jail,' letting the child know that it is ok to talk about if it is desired (Bayes, 2007). Another study emphasizes the importance of giving all children—both those whose parents are incarcerated as well as their peers—access to accurate age-appropriate information so that peers have a better understanding and so that children directly impacted have “more than their imaginations from which to draw their images...” (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008, p. 1128).

Educators clearly have a role to play. Yet, children of incarceration in Canada are a hidden population. No space for dialogue currently exists between schools and courts where schools might be informed of parental incarceration. If children of incarceration are at greater risk than other children as Murray and Farrington's study reveals, schools must be better equipped to be able to help these children. And to do that, these children should be identified. Possible fears that the 'identification of these children could lead to more harm' should be put to rest as Murray and Farrington's study further revealed, “the effects of parental incarceration are not accounted for by official labeling of prisoners' families” (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p. 1273). Others agree with Murray and Farrington. For example, one American study “encourages professionals to systematically identify children of incarcerated parents” (Miller, K. 2006, p. 472). There is some provision in parts of the UK for children of incarceration as a 'distinct group,' so that they can receive necessary supports in school. (Morgan et al., 2014). In fact a number of countries identify children of incarceration so as to

offer greater support. McCormick et al of British Columbia, calls for action in Canada to recognize and offer greater supports to children of incarceration:

...a key issue for Canada is that the children of incarcerated parents are not politically recognized as a vulnerable group of children deserving a specialized policies, programs, and services because of their protected rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). Unlike the USA, the UK, and Australia where there has been some federal and/or state government recognition of the rights and needs of this vulnerable group of children, the children of incarcerated parents do not yet appear to be part of the Canadian government child rights agenda....It is clear that more effort is needed regarding basic information collection, as well as providing supportive programming for the group of at-risk children. (McCormick et al., 2014, p. 37)

As it currently stands in Canada, the only way for a school to know if any of its students are children of offenders is if the children themselves or the caregivers of the children disclose such information. Given this current reality in our schools, the question that educators must ask is this: In the absence of vital parental information about our students, what can we do to support children of incarceration?

The Power of Story

Acknowledging children's experiences help children to feel validated. Though acknowledgment is important for all children, it can be difficult for children who feel marginalized and isolated to receive the validation they need. When children read about fictional characters that go through similar experiences as they go through, it can help them feel less alone. Donna Miller talks about the importance of children identifying with story

characters for this reason: “When readers see themselves represented in stories, they realize that they matter, that their experiences count” (Miller, 2012, p. 29). This is true for all children, including those who are marginalized. For example, Miller says: “...we might offer young adult literature that features protagonists who are differently able. With such literature, we promote and honor their identities” (Miller, 2012, p. 29). Smith-D’Arezzo & Thompson (2006) echo this thought: “Providing children with reading material that is relevant to their lives is extremely important” (p. 336). Huber, Cain, Huber, and Steeves (2013) challenge teachers to make space for the difficult stories, if “lives of diversity are to be respected” (p. 230). When “children find their existence to be invisible in the books they read, we must ask ourselves how children will look at and relate to a world that has deemed them so unimportant they do not fill the pages of books written for children, families, and schools” (Jones, 2008, p. 43).

Teachers are in a unique position of influence to help children feel validated and acknowledged. To show care for the marginalized involves educating other students on topics of sensitivity as it helps to develop care among the peers of minority groups. A good example of this is seen in *Teacher* (2015), a magazine put out by British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, in which Willum, a student who identifies as non-binary states the importance of the teacher’s role to help students in minority groups to feel safe. Willum says:

Teachers play a major role in my performance and well-being at school....The most effective form of assistance is education. I have one teacher who often incorporates ‘sensitive’ issues into class, women’s rights, hetero-normativity, queer rights, and the like. By doing this on a regular basis she sets an example to her students that these topics are to be discussed

openly, and should not be ignored or shunned. Practices such as those will ultimately have the most effect on assisting queer and other minority students. (p. 16)

Though children of incarceration—as the descriptive name itself implies—are temporarily defined by relationship, the similarity they share with other minority groups is that their experiences are not well understood. There are few resources available and little research done on effective ways to support these children, so for direction, we look at what has been done for other minority groups. Children who are part of minority groups (for example: race, intellectual ability, sexual orientation) and who are not well understood tend to be stigmatized and shunned. It is the job of the caring teacher in a caring school environment to help bring more understanding about the lived experiences of these children. Yet to do that respectfully and without drawing undue attention to children who may already suffer, requires great sensitivity and care. Reading stories of others that parallels children's experiences while deflecting attention away from them and toward the story character is a compassionate way to highlight a difficult issue.

Inclusive literature is a well-used tool for building awareness of lived experiences of minority groups. Reading stories of others who have difficult experiences can be an effective way to bring attention to an issue without putting individual students, with similar stories, in the spotlight. Such stories serve a dual purpose. First, they serve to help children with comparable experiences to feel less alone. In relating to fictional characters, readers may also be exposed to, and even equipped with new ways of thinking, bringing some respite to their own emotional trauma. Stories used in this way can be therapeutic, and can help children to “understand that they are not alone, that there are other children who also are coping with

similar challenges, whether related to a deficiency, a disorder, or a disability; thus they are able to learn of different ways of coping” (Lea, 2015, p. 53).

Secondly, inclusive literature helps to educate those who have little or no understanding of the story topic. Lea (2015) speaks to “the dual advantage of helping students with special needs understand that they are not alone and simultaneously helping other students in the classroom appreciate their classmates and the difficulties they experience” (p. 52). This second target group of children, says Lea, “consists of mainstream children, who are exposed to the world of a child with special needs through the literary work” (Lea, 2015, p. 53). Entering the world of others opens up new understanding for children. “Such shared knowledge can draw people closer,” says Lea (2015, p. 53). Lowe (2009), who focuses on using literature as a tool to help children who are in crisis, also acknowledges its dual purpose, as seen in the following statement, “Even when children are not directly affected by a difficult situation, the exposure of life crisis literature helps them to gain a greater understanding of the world and to empathize with others in our society” (p. 12). Such education must be cloaked in compassionate understanding if it is to have the kind of impact that transforms playground taunts to cheerful and inclusive play.

For children to feel less isolated, their experiences need to be understood more widely, not only by teachers, but also by peers. Andrews (1998) speaks about the importance of inclusion literature as it promotes awareness, acceptance and sensitivity toward diversity. Though she writes specifically to disabilities, the principle of inclusionary practice can be generalized to other minority groups. Andrews says, “Thus literature—inclusion literature—can become a powerful tool for helping students without disabilities to become more tolerant as today’s classrooms, as well as society, become more inclusive” (p. 420–421). Maich and

Belcher (2012) also speak about the importance of peer awareness on issues of diversity: “...peer awareness, can be thought of as the foundation to inclusion in the classroom...” (p. 207). Though they refer to children on the autistic spectrum, general principles of inclusionary practice remain the same. Maich and Belcher (2012) hone in on the function of picture books— at the preschool to late primary level—to create and support peer awareness.

Promoting awareness, acceptance, and sensitivity toward diversity taps into children’s ability to be empathetic while taking on new perspectives. Many studies show that children are able to empathize with others at a very young age. For example, Dixon, Murray, and Daiches (2013) conclude that, “young children’s perceptions and understandings of emotional difficulties in other children were sophisticated and complex” (p. 86). The children in this study who are as young as eight were given hypothetical scenarios each of which involved a character experiencing emotional difficulties and were asked to respond. The researchers reported that these children were “able to speculate on possible causes of the characters’ emotional difficulties and generated a diverse range of explanations, mainly around external, socio-environmental causes, such as family, friends, socio-economic and education factors” (Dixon et al., 2013, p. 83). Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) report that when children enter school at the age of five or six, they are developing a sense of their own emotions, and are able to feel empathy. Reading books with believable characters helps young children to grow in empathy.

Teachers have long used stories to engage young people while providing them with vicarious experiences that help to broaden their perspectives. The broadening of perspectives is an important component of empathy and care. Stories allow children to experience a range of feelings as though they were real. In fact, according to cognitive psychologists, they are

real. At a neurological level, what happens to a child who is having a vicarious experience through reading is the same as though the experience were really happening. Lysaker and Tonge (2013) speak to this: “Fictive relationships, though vicarious shape the person reading much like real ones” (p. 634). Referring to the research of Mar, Oatley, Hirsch, dela Paz, & Peterson (2006), they add: “This assertion is supported by research suggesting that the same neurological regions of the brain are stimulated whether our connections with others occur in real or fictional contexts” (Lysaker & Tonge, 2013, p. 634). Nikolejeva (2013) agrees: “A young child who smiles seeing a happy face in a picturebook,...or shudders at gaping jaws of a dinosaur, is truly experiencing the emotions as if they were real. In fact, they are real.” (p. 250).

Having vicarious experiences through literature is very important for the emotional development of children as Nikolajeva (2013) points out: “Young children have limited life experience of emotions, whereas picturebooks offer vicarious emotional experience that children can partake of....Reading picturebooks prepares children for dealing with empathy and mind-reading in real life” (p. 250). These experiences are also safe places for young children to ‘experiment’ with the world of emotions, as seen in the following quote: “Through stories, readers can try out without personal risk, new reactions and social decisions. Young readers can then use that learning to navigate their current world of peer friendships and classroom conflicts” (McTigue, Douglass, Wright, Hodges, and Franks, 2015, p. 92).

Only after children experience emotion, can they begin to talk about it and try to understand it. It is important that teachers do not get in the way of or short circuit this process, but rather try to facilitate it. Teachers should refrain from using picture books as a platform to moralize, says Murris. Instead picture books should be used a means to encourage students to

think and explore deeply, a fundamental goal of critical literacy. She uses the story, *Angry Arthur* to support her arguments. In the story, Arthur is sent to bed while he's watching his favorite show on television. His anger is so great that it causes first a thunderstorm, then a hurricane, and finally a universe-quake. When the storm settles, Arthur cannot remember why he was so angry. Typically used as a tool to help children understand the importance of controlling their anger, Murriss suggests that if teachers provide such a conclusion, they miss the opportunity to engage students by encouraging them to ask deep questions. The process of encouraging children to think and express their ideas helps teachers to better understand their students. To help develop inquiring minds, teachers must also role model the same and ask insightful and open ended questions, questions that in this case might help children understand anger rather than be too quick to condemn it. "Philosophical readings do not moralize" (Murriss, 2014, p. 154).

Murriss is also quick to point out that this does not mean there are never right answers. There may, for example be more than one right answer. It is the rationale, the justification given for the answer, that is more important than the answer itself (p. 154). A lot of classroom reading time is devoted to 'having the right answer.' "The 'testing and right answer' heritage of schooling stands in direct opposition to examining conflicting perspectives—a process that usually does not produce neat and tidy conclusions" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). "Students need opportunities to participate in unfamiliar social worlds by taking on other people's perspectives and voicing their thoughts and feelings. Picture books with ambiguous and provocative images that engage readers emotionally lead students into these unfamiliar social worlds" (Lysaker & Sedberry, 2015, p. 110). These thoughts are echoed by Leland, Lewison, and Harste (2000):

Life is not simple and easy—there is usually not one ‘right’ answer that will solve a problem. By hearing the dissenting voices of a number of characters in such books, we are better able to understand the realities of others and expand our awareness of different perspectives and stances. (p. 18)

Morris (2014) discusses the importance of engaging and being interested in the emotions that children experience, rather than simply trying to manage emotions and eradicate emotions that make us uncomfortable. Emotions are an integral part of children and if we do not acknowledge and try to understand this sometimes-complex world of the children we work with, we deny part of who they are. Offering children vicarious experiences through picture books can help them to tap into emotions, allowing their perspectives to be challenged, take on new forms, and grow. This growth has the power to transform relationships. Based on the research of Lysaker & Tonge, (2013), Mar & Oatley, (2008), Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, & Miller (2011), Lysaker & Sedberry report:

Emotion is critical to the construction of deep understandings during fiction reading and leads to a sense of engrossment in the vicarious social world of story. Beyond this, however, it is the deep empathetic response and engagement in social imagination that creates a new relational context within a reading event that can promote learning and personal transformation. (Lysaker & Sedberry, 2015, p. 106)

The relational context that Lysaker and Sedberry speak about is of central importance to Noddings. She speaks about the need for a wide scope of change in “almost every aspect of schooling” (Noddings, 1988, p. 221), and indeed her list is long. Yet she confines her analysis to the topic of relationships, as she believes it to be “central to a thorough consideration of

most of the other topics” (Noddings, 1988, p. 221). “Care ethics is a relational ethic” (Noddings, 2012, p. 53). Noddings says that “educators can manifest their care in the choice of curriculum, and appropriately chosen curriculum can contribute to the growth of children as carers” (Noddings, 1995, p. 2). Given the reality of high incarceration rates in the province of Manitoba and the higher than average number of children that the typical inmate has, it is certainly ‘appropriate’ to develop and use resources that would aid in the understanding of how parental incarceration affects children. A picture book is a powerful tool as the vicarious nature of imaginative stories help children to grow not only in knowledge but also in empathy as their perspectives toward children of incarceration shift toward greater understanding. Picture book read-alouds are particularly effective as they encourage group discussion.

“Critical literacy read-alouds challenge traditional notions of how students can interact with texts and the types of texts and topics that are appropriate for these interactions” (Labadie et al., 2013, p. 314). Labadie et al hone in on issues of poverty as they explain, “All children need opportunities to learn about socioeconomic diversity from their peers, teachers, and the pages of children’s literature. Children living in poverty may not have adequate opportunity to see themselves represented positively in media, curriculum, and literature” (2013, p. 315). Kelly and Darragh (2011) agree:

As with any struggle the issues of poverty and homelessness filter into the classroom, and teachers must find ways to address and educate their students about these delicate situations. Picture books can provide a forum for children to learn about and understand others.... (p. 264)

Developing critical and deep thinkers is an important goal, as Leland, Lewison, and Harste (2013) point out:

Many have asked us why we use books that foster risky conversations, those that often deal with issues usually kept outside of the classroom door. Why use ‘authentic and brave’ literature (Ballentine & Hill 2000) when there are so many safe books in print to use with students? (p. 61)

Risky conversations and controversy are inevitably a part of life, so it is important to model healthy ways of dialoguing with children while they are in our care and to encourage dialogue that will lead to greater understanding, empathy, and greater inclusivity of those in the margins. These kinds of conversations, say Leland et al:

...stand in stark contrast to the lifeless, routinized discourses that flow from commercial reading programs that have come to permeate many elementary and middle school classrooms. When critical conversations become part of the regular curriculum, school has the potential of becoming an exciting place where stimulating intellectual work is the rule rather than the exception. (Leland, Lewison, and Harste, 2013, p. 61)

There are few resources for teachers to support children of incarceration, and there are even fewer children’s books on the topic. Says Lange, “Unlike death, separation, or divorce, culture does not provide narratives to explain what it is like to be the child of an incarcerated adult” (Lange, 2000, p. 63). In response to this need, *Sammy’s Visit*, a story of one such child was written so that more children will give thought to and begin to understand what it is like to be a child of incarceration. By offering a glimpse into one child’s lived experience in fictional story form, students are given the opportunity to develop an awareness of the incarcerated demographic in our society as well as to consider how the incarceration of a parent may affect a child.

The Picture Book: *Sammy's Visit*

The writing of *Sammy's Visit* was inspired by an interaction I observed early on in the six years that I spent teaching in a women's correctional centre. As I was leaving work one day, I needed to go through what was to become an all too familiar succession of doors and hallways en route to my final exit gate. In so doing, I walked through a room where a guard was supervising an inmate having a visit with her two children. The mother was a woman about my age. She held a baby on her lap. While rocking her baby gently, she stared into the room. A young girl, who looked to be about 9 years of age stood awkwardly at her side. The mother was a student of mine for a short while before she was released, and though I hadn't had the opportunity to know her well, I witnessed, ever so briefly, a side of her that I'd never seen in the classroom. I knew her to be a hard working, quiet and friendly woman. What is etched in my memory is the look of deep sadness I observed in that moment. And the child? What of the child? This question haunted me. As I was to learn later, this mother was one of the 'lucky ones'. While many incarcerated parents are denied physical contact with their children, she was able to hold her child. She also had a loved one in her life who brought her children to the facility for visits. These are the hopeful images I held on to and wanted to portray in *Sammy's Visit* in hopes that the story would not only compel, but would also resonate with young readers.

Mo Korchinski, another woman I met at the correctional centre, created the illustrations for *Sammy's Visit*. As a mother who has also served time, Mo understands first hand the pain of familial separation due to incarceration. Since 2007, Korchinski has worked as a counselor and peer researcher in a collaborative participatory action research project called *Women in2 Healing* (Wi2H) where among other things she helps women deal with

post-release trauma. Korchinski's artistic flair is readily evident as one visits the facebook page called, Unlocking the Gates (<https://www.facebook.com/unlockingthegates/>). She has also contributed artwork to a number of related publications.

Dr. Elwood Martin, director of the Collaborating Centre for Prison Health and Education at the University of British Columbia, and former physician for incarcerated women was instrumental in the formation of *Wi2H*. *Wi2H* is located within Women's Health Research Institute of BC Women's Hospital and operates as a not-for-profit network of formerly incarcerated women, volunteers and academics who seek to "improve the physical, emotional, social and physical healing of women inside and outside of prison by engaging in participatory research processes" (Elwood Martin, personal communication, 2017). *Wi2H* has been actively involved in social change for incarcerated women in British Columbia. Their contributions are excellent examples of the third and fourth dimensions of critical literacy that Lewison et al (2002) speak about: "focusing on sociopolitical issues" (p. 383), and "taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 383). For example, among other things, they were involved in empowering incarcerated women with research tools and skills, promoting better living conditions for women in jail, and for challenging and winning a 2014 court battle forcing the BC government to reinstate the rights of babies to stay in jail with their mothers if they are born while their mothers are serving time. *Wi2H* continually promotes social justice and actively fosters greater understanding of the incarcerated demographic and their families. Their current projects include the 'Unlocking the Gates Peer Health Mentoring Program, which supports women for three days following their release from prison, and the 'Arresting Hope Educational Fund' which provides educational bursaries for women with incarceration experience and their children.

Sammy's Visit follows a young girl as she visits her mother in jail. Readers are invited to experience the complex emotional landscape of a child who misses her mother. Sadness, playfulness, confusion, and hope; a multiplicity of human emotions are woven into the story. By tapping into these emotions vicariously, it is hoped that readers will have a better understanding of the internal experiences that children of incarceration live with. The story invites dialogue with respect to the first two dimensions of critical literacy. The first dimension of critical literacy focuses on a shift in perspective. A typical perspective of jail might be one that regards all people in custody as “bad” or “scary” people. *Sammy's Visit* offers another view, that of someone who has a loving relationship with her daughter where fairy tales and poetry are positive points of connection. The second dimension of critical literacy focuses on entering into the experiences of another. As children read the story, they follow and observe Sammy, and they are also given access to her thoughts and feelings, making it easier to ‘step into her shoes’. My hope is that greater understanding toward a story character will ultimately transition into expressing greater empathy toward children of incarcerated parents, so that inclusivity at the classroom level toward this hidden demographic of children will be practiced. This study will attempt to answer the question: Does a picture book help children to understand and be empathetic toward those affected by parental incarceration?

Chapter Three: Methods

In this study I set out to explore whether the reading of a children's story interspersed with and followed by a discussion within a small group setting can develop understanding and empathy toward a child of an incarcerated parent. I carried out this study in order to explore the effects of a read aloud— about a young girl who visits her mother in jail—interspersed and followed by a group discussion. I read the story to three groups of children, stopping periodically to discuss comments or questions that children had. When children asked questions of me, I re-directed back to the group, trying to avoid answering any questions myself, and encouraging them to elaborate and explore why they felt the way they did. I asked questions through out the story (as seen in Appendix C) and when the story reading was over, I followed the set of Protocol questions (as seen in Appendix D), encouraging discussion. The children in all three groups were engaged, sharing freely from start to finish.

I chose to use focus groups as a method for collecting data as it is a method that provides a natural classroom like setting for children and one that students are familiar with. Yet the smaller group allowed all children to participate in a way that would have been more difficult to do in a larger classroom setting. The small group was also more intimate, allowing children to express themselves more freely than they might have been comfortable doing in a larger setting. In his guide, *Focus Groups As Qualitative Research*, Morgan (1988) suggests, “focus groups are better suited to topics of attitudes and cognitions...” (p. 17). As this study seeks to explore perspectives toward children of offenders, focus groups appear to be a fitting method.

While a large classroom setting would have been too big for my purposes, individual interviews would have been too small. As I wanted to observe interactions among children as

they answered and discussed questions between themselves, individual interviews would have been an inappropriate method to use. Dixon, et al (2012) explain why focus groups was a method they chose to use, “Focus groups were chosen rather than individual interviews to enable children to discuss their views in a familiar and less threatening way” (p. 74). The focus groups—or group interviews—tapped more effectively into what the children were thinking than individual interviews would do. Morgan summarizes this advantage of group interviewing well: “One advantage of group interviewing is that the participants’ interaction among themselves replaces their interaction with the interviewer, leading to a greater emphasis on participants’ points of view” (Morgan, 1991, p. 18).

School buildings seemed the appropriate places for this research to take place. Although I hope in future that teachers might read and discuss the book in their classrooms, conducting the research with smaller groups of children was important for me as it allowed me to better understand the connections that students may have with the topics presented in the text; insights gained through this process could be helpful to teachers who choose to use the material. As educators, we strive to develop inclusive classrooms of critical thinkers. As this research focuses on developing more inclusive environments in our schools through the use of critical literature, I felt that school is where the research needed to take place.

After defending my thesis proposal, I applied for and received permission from the board of ethics to conduct this study. Given the topic of the study is one that involves children as participants, my application was considered by the entire Education and Nursing Ethics Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba. The approval certificate may be found in Appendix E.

Participants

I worked with three focus groups of children (ten girls, seven boys), in a grade three to five range (three grade 3 students, eight grade 4 students, six grade 5 students). Each group was made up of five or six students, and each group met once during the school day in a quiet room in the school building for approximately one hour.

I sent a letter to a superintendent of a rural school division, explaining my project and requesting permission to conduct my study in three of the elementary schools in the division. I chose this division because of its demographic variation; I hoped to have the opportunity to conduct research in two or more schools with varying demographic realities as I was interested in whether or not this would affect student responses. Since I had read the story, *Sammy's Visit* in the past to elementary aged students and felt that discussions with children tended to be rich and meaningful in the grade three to five range, I settled on this age range. Although I was open to conducting research with more than three groups of children, since many levels of permission were required, I thought it might be difficult to form more than three groups. Yet I wanted at least three groups so as to create some forms of comparison. After contacting the superintendent, I was invited to present my project at the next monthly Principals' meeting, giving principals the opportunity to participate if they chose to. After my presentation, I handed out letters and consent forms to the principals. In these letters, I summarized my research project and asked if they would assist me by sending letters home to the parents of grades three to five students in their respective schools. Three principals invited me to come to their schools to conduct my research.

In the letters to the parents, I explained that the research project explores the role of children's literature in developing understanding and empathy. The principals passed out my

letters of invitation, complete with consent forms for parents and assent forms for their children to sign. My contact information was included so that parents could contact me should they have further questions. Of the three schools I was invited to, I received six responses from one school, five responses from another school, and only one response from the third school. A single response was not enough to form a focus group, but since I subsequently received an additional six responses from the first school, a second focus group from that school was formed. As I had hoped, I received invitations to two schools in communities that were significantly different from each other.

The first six responses I received formed the first focus group, which I have called Group One. Another six responses from this same school formed the second focus group, and I have called this group of students Group Two. The school attended by these children is situated in an economically depressed, rural community where—according to the principal of the school—Child and Family Services is quite active; he informed me that many students in this school are in foster care. The five children who formed the third focus group come from a school situated in a wealthier, middle class community. Although this community is also rural, it is close to a large urban centre and many of its residents are commuters. Many of this town's residents are also well-educated professionals. I have called the group of children from this school, Group Three. See Table 1.

Table 1: Focus Group Compositions

Research Focus Groups: ages 8–10 years old		
	Group 1 & 2	Group 3
Size of Group	6 students each	5 students
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Low-socio economic population • Child & Family Services very active in community • School offers breakfast & lunch programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural (commuter community) • Middle class/Wealthy • Professional parents

Materials

The story, *Sammy's Visit* is a picture book that has been formatted as an eBook. I used this eBook for my study with students in the schools, and projected the book onto a wall with each focus group. The transcript of the story can be seen in Appendix C. Materials used for the focus group sessions included: a laptop for reading the eBook story, *Sammy's Visit*, a Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Appendix D), a video projector, and a digital audio recording device to record the discussion.

Procedure

After receiving six consent and assent forms from parents and children of the first school, the principal and I arranged for a 1:30 pm visit. When we met in a quiet multi-purpose room to read the story, I explained to the students that I was conducting a study and we would read a story together and have a discussion about it. I explained that the session would take approximately one hour of their time and that it would be audio recorded. I assured the students that no one other than myself would listen to the recording and that whatever they said would be kept confidential; I explained that any names used in publications and disseminations of research results would be replaced with pseudonyms. I also reminded

students to maintain confidentiality about things said and heard during the focus group session. I reminded them that their participation was voluntary, and if anyone changed their minds about wanting to participate at any time during the study, they were free to discontinue. I provided a snack at the end of our session. I met with the participants of each focus group during school hours (1:30 pm in all cases) in a quiet space of their respective schools (a multi-purpose room in the first two cases and a smaller resource meeting room in the third case).

I began the audio-recording at the start of the session—which included student introductions and the story reading—so as not to miss any reflective comments children chose to contribute, or questions they had during the reading of the story. I introduced the story by showing them the cover page and asked them to make predictions as to what they thought the story would be about. I did not comment on what they were about to hear, as I wanted to let the story speak for itself and wanted the children's thoughts and feelings to be as unprompted as possible. I projected the story onto a blank wall for all to see, while the children gathered around to listen. As students looked at the cover page they talked about what they saw, wondering who Sammy might be and what the story might be about. I stopped periodically throughout the reading of the story (as noted in Appendix C) allowing students opportunities to make new predictions and express their thoughts. Listening to the children's conversation before hand was insightful as it helped me to get to know the children, and told me something about their prior knowledge and experiences as well as what they were thinking about in the moment. After I finished reading the story, I lead the group in a discussion, guided by the questions in the semi-structured Interview Protocol (Appendix D). Students were invited to share their thoughts and feelings throughout the guided discussion. No one was coerced into speaking; participation at every level was voluntary. Following are some brief thoughts and

rationale behind the questions that were created for student discussion at the end of the story. Some of these questions have the potential to elicit responses reflecting one or more of Lewison et al's four dimensions of critical literacy (2002). It is however important to remember "that these dimensions are interrelated and none of them stand-alone" (Lewison et al., 2002).

1. What do you think about the story? What were you thinking about as I read it?

I wanted to collect immediate first impressions. I also wanted to be sure that there was basic comprehension before we dug deeper into story analysis. How students answer this question has the potential to shed some light on whether or not the "commonplace has been disrupted" and if so, how much it has been disrupted (Lewison et al., 2002).

2. I wonder what sorts of feelings Sammy has. What do you think?
3. Have you ever had similar feelings?

These questions begin to tap into students' understanding and empathy. This also taps into the ability to "interrogate multiple perspectives" that Lewison et al., (2002) speak about.

4. Does Sammy remind you of anyone you know or any other characters from other books?

The way students answer this could shed light on their own background and familiarity with the topic of incarceration.

5. What would you want to ask Sammy?

The way children answer this may tell us something about their sensitivity towards Sammy. Though curiosity about Sammy's mother may be normal, questions

related to her mother's crime could be quite painful to Sammy and others like her. Other questions such as, "Do you want to play?" or "Are you ok?" could indicate empathy and readiness for friendship. Are they asking questions about food banks and poverty? If so, this question may potentially lead to a discussion of socio-political issues, Lewison et al's (2002) third dimension of critical literacy. This would indicate readiness for more challenging conversations.

6. If you could, what would you do to help Sammy (to feel better, depending on how they answer question two)?

The way students answer this might indicate the level of readiness to be friendly or to reach out in friendship to Sammy. Supposing a student suggests that they would like to start up a food drive for a local food bank (as a way of helping children like Sammy), it could indicate that there is some understanding of Sammy's world. A discussion may ensue about how to be more actively involved in social justice issues, the fourth of dimension of Lewison et al's (2002) critical literacy.

7. I wonder how you would feel if your mom or dad went away for a long time.

In this question, children are being asked to "put themselves into Sammy's shoes." Are they able to do that?

8. If Sammy went to your school, would you want to be friends with her?

Why or why not? (Ask what activities they'd do or things they'd talk about)

I am interested in what children would do with Sammy. For example, do they like the same kind of stories, imaginary whims and movement, the same kind of food, etc.? In other words, do they see Sammy as a potential friend, or are they unable to look past the fact that her mom is in jail? Is Sammy only defined by this

relationship or is there more to her? Does the story context help children to see and appreciate more aspects to Sammy than they might otherwise?

9. How might other kids your age think about the story?

If children have feelings they do not want to admit or are embarrassed about, this question gives them the opportunity to use other people as their mouthpiece; it could potentially offer greater insight into how they are feeling.

10. How would you feel if teachers would use this story in your class?

Similar to the question above, the way students respond to this question may provide additional insights as to their thoughts about the story.

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

This is an opportunity for children to voice any lingering comments or questions they may still have.

After the first focus group met, I transcribed fully the audio recordings (replacing all participants' names with pseudonyms), and wrote down other observations while they were fresh on my mind, noting student facial expressions, body language, mood, and the tone with which things were said. Then I began to analyze the transcriptions, looking for words and ideas that reflected their feelings and thoughts about Sammy or other aspects of the story. I was especially interested to find out whether understanding and empathy was expressed toward children of incarcerated parents and whether thoughts expressed by the children engendered feelings of inclusivity towards children of incarcerated parents.

I followed the same method with the other two focus groups. The focus group sessions lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, and I transcribed about 50-60 pages of data from each focus group visit. After all the transcriptions and individual analysis were completed, I read and re-

read them all, looking for similar responses from group to group. I began coding, looking for overlapping words and ideas from the three transcriptions, taking note of patterns, and grouping similar ideas into themes. I began with a great many more themes than these five themes and two sub themes I finally settled on:

1. Life experiences Impacts Empathy
2. Identifying With Mixed Emotions
3. Perceptual Shifts: Fear Turns to Warmth
4. Embodying an Ethic of Care: Story Elicits Empathy
 - Offering Friendship: Enthusiasm vs Reluctance
5. The Role of Literary Hooks in Critical Literacy

This process was a lengthy one as I collapsed a number of categories together under broader headings, renaming them. I found that the more I reflected on the categories I had created, the more I discovered about the children and their responses, and consequently this resulted in even more collapsing or shifting of themes. For example, many of the thoughts about Sammy's mother that were expressed, could quite easily be categorized as either feelings of fear or feelings of warmth. While at the outset I created these two categories trying to identify who had feelings of fear and who had feelings of warmth, it became apparent that children or groups of children could not be so easily divided into one of two categories as they often fit into both. In fact, the children's feelings seemed to change as they came to know Sammy's mother, and so I collapsed this into one sub-theme renaming it, "Fear Turns to Warmth." This change demonstrates the perceptual shift that Lewison et al (2002) talks about. As I considered the perceptual shifts occurring in the minds of the children as seen in their discussion, I reflected on the perceptual shifts that were constantly occurring within myself as

I organized and reorganized headings during the data analysis stage. Taking the time to reflect on the themes, changing and reorganizing these themes was integral to gaining an understanding of the thought patterns of the children. This finally gave me a sense of the effect that the story had on the three focus groups, and shed light on the question as to whether this story helps children understand other children who are affected by parental incarceration.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

Of the three groups, children from both Group One and Group Two come from a rural, community school with a lower socio-economic background. Children from Group Three come from a school in a rural and more middle-class background. I will begin by discussing how these demographics impact the way in which the children respond to various aspects of the story, *Sammy's Visit*. I will follow this by discussing other, common themes that came up and were explored in each of the focus group sessions. These themes include: identifying with mixed emotions; thoughts toward Sammy's mother that changed from feelings of fear to feelings of warmth; reaching out to Sammy with friendliness, and reaching out more deeply with friendship; and finally, the the role of literary hooks. If literature is to have an impact on us, we must find ways to connect with it.

I found that the children in all of the groups were engaged throughout the activity, enjoyed the story, and enjoyed talking about it. Students were able to work through the questions I posed and dynamic discussions occurred in each of the three groups. Students identified with Sammy, albeit to a greater or lesser extent; that is, most were willing to be friendly and comforting toward her, while many, but not all went further and were eager to extend friendship.

Children's quotes will be used throughout this chapter to illustrate and to provide greater depth and meaning to the overall discussion. All names used are pseudonyms and all other identifiers have been removed.

Life Experiences Impacts Empathy

Of the three focus group sessions, responses from the communities they represented differed in significant ways. For example, when Sammy's grandma makes a reference to the

story, *Stone Soup*, I asked the children whether they were familiar with this story. Everybody in Group Three said they had heard it, while few in either Group One or Group Two expressed familiarity with this fairy tale. One wonders whether the children in one community may have had richer language experiences outside of school, such as more parental reading times in their homes.

Another example reflecting differences in background experience and knowledge is seen in the children's responses to questions about the food bank that is referred to in *Sammy's Visit*. When children were asked if they knew what this was, no one in Group Three seemed to know, whereas there were many knowing nods among children from Groups One and Two. Here is a sample of responses from Group Two:

Alex: Isn't it like where people donate food and other people can pick up food from there?

Amber: I think a food bank is, like for people who don't make a lot of money. It's kind of like a charity where you just drop off stuff for people who really need it.

Thomas: Where you get food for free.

Children in Group Three appeared to understand neither the concept nor function of a food bank. Even when leading questions were used, the children did not readily comprehend as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Morgan: A food bank is um, like uh, grocery store.

Annie: It's um, so it's where you go shopping at like in the day and you buy food.

Researcher: Ok. Any other thoughts about what a food bank is?

Sheldon: It's like tables, where they collect money and they sell food.

Researcher: A place that **sells** food?

Annie: Or sells money.

Morgan: A local food bank is like an outdoor grocery store. [There is confusion and whispering among the children.]

Researcher: Is it a **store** where they **sell**? [still probing, to see how much they may know]

Morgan: They're a trading—? No. Like um, it's a free, like... where they uh...

Annie: Where they give out food—?

Researcher: Ahh. Ok! Why would they do that? Any thoughts?

Several Voices: No.

Researcher: Let's read on. Maybe we'll find out.

In the story, once Sammy and her grandmother reach their destination, her grandma pays the taxi driver with the exact change. I asked the students why she needed to pay with exact change. This question took the children some time to deconstruct. After we talked about the practice of tipping taxi drivers, the students in Group Two *immediately* responded by commenting on Grandma's lack of funds. For example, Susie said, "Maybe because she didn't have more money." Amber said, "Um, I think when they pay they have to pay the exact change cause they wouldn't have money left over." Raylene said, "She doesn't have enough money." In Group Three, the students looked confused and slowly began to make connections as they considered different aspects of the story. It took a while for the idea of poverty to

emerge, but when it did, they were clearly struck by this connecting theme as seen in these responses:

Morgan: She like doesn't want to like give a tip because then at the start they said they have a small apartment, so they might not have enough money, so they look for the exact change.

Researcher: Ok, ok. Good thinking. Were there any other clues that maybe show they might have to be careful with their money? [There is a lot of whispering and discussing.]

Morgan: Oh, the soup! The, the food bank!

Courtney: Oh, the soup! The food bank! The local food bank—you get free food, and she kept making food from scratch! [

Researcher: Hmm! So maybe they have to be really careful with their money?

Courtney: I think they're kind of poor.

The children constructed the theme of poverty by piecing together various events that occur throughout the story, which they then deconstructed to figure out what a food bank might be. Where their own lived experiences may not have given the children in Group Three the same kind of insights into making this connection as may have been the case among the children in the other two groups, the story may have helped them to make an important connection between crime and poverty, where a high correlation does indeed exist.

Children from Groups One and Two seem more familiar and even at ease with the concepts of poverty and incarceration. Words used at their own initiative reflect such understandings. For example, that Sammy might be a “foster” child is a

suggestion made early on in the story by children in each of these two groups. Given the concerns expressed by this school's principal regarding the high numbers of children in care, this is not a surprising choice of words. Early on in the reading of the story, children in Groups One and Two predicted both the idea that Sammy might be poor, and the idea that Sammy's mother might be in jail. When jail was mentioned, Group Two accused Sammy's mom of various crimes. Though Kylie suggested that Sammy's mother might be serving time for murder, she later conceded that the crime might be less serious and perhaps would not warrant jail time at all—at least not in the traditional sense—and went on to offer an alternative to a jail sentence. Kylie and Raylene's familiarity with this topic is reflected by the vocabulary they used, as seen in this exchange:

Kylie: Maybe they put her on house arrest because she did something bad,
but not something **too** bad that, like she need to go to jail, jail, jail,
but just a house arrest.”

Raylene: Yeah, house arrest.

House arrest at some level is part of the knowledge and/or experience of these children or they would not have used this word with such ease and familiarity.

Lacking in this same kind of knowledge and experience, the children from Group Three seemed to rely on the stereotypic images of jail as reflected in some of their responses. For example—pointing to an illustration, Annie commented, “She’s not in prison clothes. She looks like Steve from Minecraft,” implying perhaps that the pictures look too playful and not austere enough to fit the image she may have of jail clothes. Similarly, Brett pointed to a

picture as well and said, “So like, they said they sat on a couch there. But there is no couches at jail.”

Identifying With Mixed Emotions

All participants from the three focus groups talked about the emotions—often mixed emotions—that the protagonist, Sammy experiences and exhibits throughout the story, *Sammy’s Visit*. Words that the children used to describe her feelings include: sad, happy, droopy, mad, scared, angry, frustrated, worried, alone, nervous, shy. Alice described her feelings metaphorically, “Her feelings kind of go up and down like waves.” She also reflected on Sammy’s inability to express her feelings: “Sometimes, I think that sometimes she can’t let out her feelings like something’s blocking her way.”

When the children were asked if they had ever experienced mixed feelings, there were many nods as stories were freely shared. Children in all three groups identified feelings that come from the death of a loved one as similar to the feelings of separation that Sammy experiences. Alice, a particularly expressive student from the first focus group had this to say, “Sometimes, like when one of my loved ones pass away, and you’re sad, and—but then when you think of the happy things you did together, it kind of brightens you up.” Courtney from Group Three said, “When my nana died and couldn’t really see her again, I felt like Sammy did when she was all sad cause she doesn’t get to see her mother all the time.” Amber from the second group shared the following, “When my grandpa died, I had dreams about him a lot—almost every night and that makes me happy and also really sad.” Death of pets was also talked about. For example, Kylie from Group Two said, “When my cats, died, it was hard on me. I think about them and tears shed. And then I think about the good things they did and I’m happy, and then it turns back to sad cause I miss them.”

Several students expressed their enjoyment of the treatment of emotions in the story as can be seen in the following interaction from Group Three:

Courtney: I like the emotions in it. She feels like happy, and sad and then nervous, and then she feels happy again when she sees her mother.

Researcher: Ok. What do you think other kids your age would think about the story?

Sheldon: I think other people in my class would like it because most people in my class like adventures and she technically goes to an adventure on emotions.

Perceptual Shifts: Fear Turns to Warmth

The first sentence of the story, *Sammy's Visit* elicited two very different responses from the two different communities. After some initial conversation where children made predications about the story and guessed at who Sammy might be, I began to read to Group Three.

Researcher: Grandma, I don't want to visit Mom tomorrow," said Sammy as she shuffled, barefoot, into the kitchen of their tiny apartment." So who is Sammy?

Annie: That girl [pointing to the picture of Sammy]. But *why* doesn't she want to visit her mom? [voice rising] Sammy's mom is the one who made her!

Using the same story prediction process followed by reading only the first sentence of the story as with Group Three above, the children from Group Two had a lot to say about why

Sammy may not want to visit her mom. Note how differently the children in Group Two viewed Sammy's mother:

Kylie: Maybe because she's bad.

Researcher: Maybe who's bad?

Kylie: Her mother.

Researcher: Maybe her mom's bad? Ok.

Alex: Maybe her mother beats her.

Researcher: Oh. Maybe her mom beats her?

Kylie: Or abandons her. Maybe her mother abandons her.

At this point in the story, all that is known is that Sammy doesn't want to go visit her mom. It is interesting that a child from each of these groups instinctively took "sides" with either Sammy or her mother. Annie rebuked Sammy for not wanting to visit her mom. Conversely, Kylie and Alex appeared to assume the worst in Sammy's mother, and they did not mince words when they suggested that she might "beat" or "abandon" her daughter. Given the involvement of Child and Family Services in this community, one wonders whether these are the kind of harsh realities these children have been exposed to in the past.

As the story progresses to the next page, the difference in the way Sammy's mother is perceived continues, albeit subtle. Brett from Group Three said: "So maybe she like slept over at her granny's, and she likes sleeping over there, and yeah." Courtney agreed, "I think she doesn't want to do that because um, she likes to stay with her grandma longer and stuff." Perhaps they have happy associations with visiting their own grandparents. Whatever the case, the reason that Sammy doesn't want to visit her mother, according to these responses,

has little to do with her not wanting to see her mother. Rather, she is having a good time at her grandma's house, and doesn't want it to end.

The second group on the other hand had already decided that the mother is "bad," and they continued to develop this scenario. Susie suggested, "Maybe Sammy's a foster child." The responsibility that comes with Grandma's caregiving role was not lost on Kylie as the conversation turned to Sammy's grandmother:

Kylie: Maybe um when her grandma gets old and she needs to go to a retirement home and stuff, that um she doesn't want Sammy to get lonely and do anything bad or anything. So she wants her to go see her mom and that way she... So that way her mom and her get along. So that way someone could take care of her.

Researcher: Ok. So if things aren't so good between Sammy and her mom, she's doing what she can to make it better, you think? Interesting idea, Kylie.

Simon and Alice from Group One did not appear to side with one or the other, but simply tried to understand the disconnect between mother and daughter as seen in this thoughtful exchange,

Simon: Um, because maybe there's something going on in her life or with her mom.

Alice: Maybe she misses her mom.

By the time it becomes apparent in the story that Sammy's mother is in jail, all of the groups had predicted this as a possibility. Not only had children in Group Two predicted that she is in jail, Raylene and Kylie had predicted *why* she is serving time: "She went to jail cause

she did something bad, like...murder.” However, in Group Three—though the possibility that Sammy’s mom is incarcerated had been brought up—the children expressed facial astonishment when the story reveals that the correctional centre is indeed Sammy and Grandma’s destination. Members of Group Two on the other hand, were more taken with the fact that their prediction had been correct, as noted in this exchange:

Kylie: She’s in jail for women. I knew it! I knew it!

Raylene: I knew it!

All of the groups expressed curiosity about events that lead to her incarceration. Some looked to me for answers to satisfy their curiosity (“The story doesn’t tell us” was my standard reply). Others said that they would ask Sammy about her mother’s crime if Sammy were at their school. Though this is perhaps a natural curiosity, questions like this could do harm to children who already suffer. It is important that when teachers guide such discussions they do so with care and sensitivity, and that such opportunities are used to help children grow in their knowledge and insights so as to develop greater sensitivity, and learn that asking about a parent’s crime can be very painful to a child and should never be asked. Kylie reflected on having made such a mistake in the past:

Kylie: I wouldn’t ask her about her family. I wouldn’t want her to get sad.

I have asked someone about their family when they got sad. And I would talk about butterflies and stuff she loves and her grandma [someone interjects to remind her that her grandma *is* family]. Well, people she love. Stuff she talks about a lot.

Kylie’s response reveals that an unsuccessful interaction she had had in the past has helped her to grow in her own sensitivity skills, and she seemed eager to share this

insight with others in the group. This also highlights one of the benefits of group discussions, whereby children can learn from each other.

Children from all three focus groups expressed nervousness and in some cases, fear of Sammy's mother, wanting to know what kind of crime she'd committed that would warrant incarceration. This is reflected in the following comments from children in Group One and Three:

Simon: She's scared to see her mom.

Morgan: I think if I was seeing my mom in jail, I'd think that my mom just like stole, like broke into somewhere or something, and I'd feel like, unsafe around her.

Courtney: I'd feel like, sad to see my mom in a jail cell and feel kind of uh, nervous to see her. And like—why she got in jail?

The comments from children in Group Two focused on Sammy's feelings of fear as seen in the following exchange,

Susie: Maybe she's scared of her mother.

Kylie: Maybe she's scared of everybody else.

Raylene: Or maybe her mother's with somebody else, like a roommate?

Alex: Or maybe she's drinking or on drugs and everything?

Raylene: She's a drinker! [said derisively]

Yet, once the children had met Sammy's mother or at least by the end of the story, they all said softer and warmer things about her. For example, at the end of the story, when asked what they thought about her as a mom, this idea was expressed:

Morgan: Well um, that being a mother she felt like she had to be there
always [for Sammy].

Researcher: Ok, what made you think that?

Morgan: Because um, when my uhh—I watched the news once, and ah this
guy was in jail and he was like seeing his daughter for the first time
in like 50 years or something.

Something about the memory of the news story about an incarcerated parent seemed to elicit empathy toward Sammy's mother. Other thoughts that the children expressed about Sammy's mom include:

Courtney: She seems like, um like a really nice mom. And she doesn't like
being in jail away from her daughter. And she wants to get out and
be free and stuff.

Alex: She's a very nice mother.

Amber: Like how you think something really bad about her, but then you
actually find out that at the end it's all good. And if you're mad at
somebody then you could just say at the end, it's good.

When asked how they would feel if their mom or dad would go away for a really long time, responses from children in all three groups expressed sorrow. For example:

Raylene: I would feel really sad.

Kylie: I would feel—I'd be sad. I don't want to say goodbye. I'd want to
take her home. I cried when I face timed my mom when she was
away.

Susie: I would feel sad and nervous.

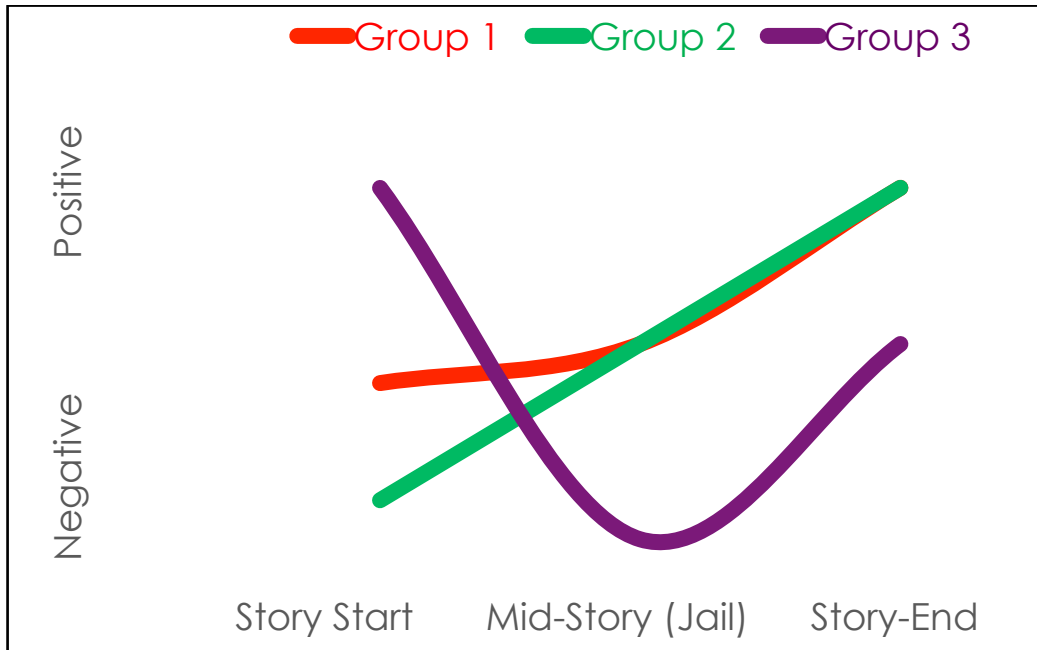
Annie: My heart would be broken.... I LOVE my parents!

Many voices: [speaking at once] Alone, sad, afraid, scared, lonely.

Simon: You could be scarred for life because you don't know if your
parents are coming home or not.

Perceptions about Sammy's mom shifted in all three groups. Such perceptual shifts characterize Lewison et al's (2002) first dimension of critical literacy, that which disrupts the commonplace. These perceptual shifts, however had different starting points. Children in Group Two who initially expressed harsh judgment toward Sammy's mom, by the end of the story expressed more grace and compassion toward her. On the other hand, the incarceration of Sammy's mom is not something that was anticipated by the children of Group Three. They had expressed no ill feelings toward her up to that point and found the revelation of her incarceration to be unsettling. At this point, they expressed nervousness and fear, but by the end of the story, they too were expressing greater compassion. Children in Group Two were somewhat surprised to learn of the mother's incarceration, and they were saddened by it. Their feelings of nervousness also shifted to care and compassion. Figure 1 illustrates perceptual shifts that occurred with all of the groups. Groups One and Two shifted from negative to positive feelings, while Group Three shifted from positive to negative feelings and slowly shifted in a more positive direction again.

Figure 1: Perceptual Shifts



The third dimension of critical literacy is also evident here. Encountering Sammy's mom had the children thinking and talking about the justice system, which Sammy's mother is a part of. As the children came to know and like Sammy's mom, they also became more upset by her incarceration. While some suggested her arrest and imprisonment might be an "accident" and preferred to believe that she was falsely accused and sentenced, others assumed wrong doing and tried to understand it, as Morgan's comment reflects: "I think she mighta got into jail because maybe she didn't have enough money and she had to steal money and then she got into jail." This touches on Lewison et al's (2002) third dimension of critical literacy: focusing on socio-political issues. Though the children didn't pursue the discussion further by questioning the fairness of the judicial system, the groundwork is being laid for future engagement in such critical and important conversations.

Embodying an Ethic of Care: Story Elicits Empathy

After children identified that Sammy has a problem, they were asked what they might do to help her feel better. Children in Group One offered to give her treats such as cookies and cupcakes. Children in Group Two offered food as well, but several of their offerings reflect that they had also paid close attention to the story and were thinking about things they knew Sammy would like, such as tuna sandwiches, homemade soup and a butterfly garden. Other responses in both groups include: hugging and playing as things they would do to make her feel better, embodying the ethic of care that Noddings speaks about. This response is an example of the care and compassion expressed by the children:

Kylie: I would ask her, ‘How are you? How did all this happen? Are you
ok? Would you like to come over for dinner? Is there anything I can
do for you? Try to make her happy and not think about the un-
positive stuff.

Many of the children in Group One seemed to recognize that people who are sad require two things: an antidote of happy distractions as well as the opportunity to talk about one’s feelings. Alice included both of these ideas in the same sentence, “I would talk about how she feels so that I can think of a way to help her and then play with her or something.” Simon, expressing a deep understanding of human needs, took this a step further and said, “We could tell her how *we* feel, so she’s more comfortable to tell us how *she* feels.” He expressed empathy as he tried to imagine how she would feel and what her needs might be. He also recognized the important role that Sammy’s grandmother plays in helping Sammy, as seen in this comment: “She’s trying to keep strong in front of Sammy.” Simon did not have

difficulty looking at things from the perspective of others, which is an example of Lewison et al's (2002) second dimension of critical literacy, that of interrogating multiple viewpoints.

Courtney, from Group Three, also expressed empathy as seen in her comment, "Include her in all your games that you play and get her mind off her mother." But other responses from this group reveal that they had difficulty looking past the fact that Sammy's mother is in jail. To help her, they felt a need to address this problem. Using denial—motivated perhaps by the desire to vindicate her mother—was an approach Brett chose. He proposed to help Sammy feel better by convincing her of her mother's innocence, as seen in his comments:

Brett: Ok. Like, "Don't worry, she didn't do ANYTHING. Her mom didn't do anything. She just went to jail for no reason."

Researcher: That's what you would say?

Brett: Yeah.

Ill equipped to help Sammy, his confusion was evident when I asked him whether he thought this would be helpful. Looking downcast, he admitted it probably would not help. Though this kind of "help" would almost certainly be harmful, what is clear in his tone is that it was offered from a heart of compassion.

Morgan suggests, "Um. Oh, yeah. Um, I'd buy her mother out of jail to make her feel better." Though his solution is not realistic, like Brett he offered this help because he felt sorry for Sammy. When another student told him he would need a lot of money to get her mother out of jail, he had nothing more to add. These children were troubled by the plight of Sammy as seen by these responses:

Annie: My heart would be broken.

Brett: I'd say "God please bring back my parents!"

Researcher: So you would pray?

Brett: Yeah.

I probed further by asking whether it would be a good story for children like Sammy to read.

The responses from the children in Group Three were very decided:

Researcher: Ok. Let's say there was somebody in your class who has a parent in jail. Do you think this would be a good story for them to read or to hear?

Annie: No.

Researcher: Why not?

Annie: Cause then they'll think of it again and start to cry.

Researcher: Ok. Brett? [his hand is raised]

Brett: I would say, if I already heard this before, I would say to the teacher, "I don't think this is a good story for the person who had her mom in jail because that's what it's about."

Researcher: Ok. Courtney?

Courtney: I think if a person in my class' mother had been in jail, it would not be a good story cause it would bring up memories.

I gently challenged this notion, and the following dialogue ensued:

Researcher: Ok. Is it always bad to bring up memories or to feel sad?

Morgan: Yeah... Sometimes it's good.

Courtney: Sometimes it's good to feel sad.

Annie: Sometimes you'll cry. And sometimes it's a bad thing.

Researcher: Do you think not bringing it up is going to make that person happy,
or will they still have sadness?

Many voices: They'll still be sad.

Students in Groups One and Two however did not seem so afraid of sadness, recognizing that it is part of life as seen in this dialogue:

Researcher: How do you think that would be if a teacher would read this story
to the class?

Lionel: Some of the class would cry.

Simon: Yeah, some of the girls. [This did not sound mean-spirited, nor does
it appear to be interpreted that way by the girls in the group, who
agree.]

Girls: Yeah. [empathetically]

Researcher: Is that a bad thing or is that ok?

Many voices: It's ok.

Researcher: Yeah? Tell me why it's ok.

Cora: Cause it's ok to express yourself.

Chloe: Cause everybody has feelings.

Alice: And everybody has cried before.

Researcher: It's ok to be emotional?

Alice: Everyone has cried before.

Researcher: Everyone has cried, yeah. Is it important to cry sometimes and to
feel sad about certain things?

Many voices: Yes

Group Two responded in a similar way:

Researcher: Being sad—is it always a bad thing?

Kylie: No. You're getting stuff out, stuff that makes you feel sad. And
then you can feel the good stuff, and the future, and what's gonna
happen next.

Group Two went on to talk about the hope found in the story. Said Kylie, "It would let them know that there's still hope. There's hope to come home. There's still hope." Amber said, "If you're going through something like that, this book's good. That way you'd know that you'll probably be ok at the end."

Offering Friendship: Enthusiasm vs Reluctance. Reaching out to Sammy in kindness and friendliness is a first step toward reaching out in friendship, a deeper type of reaching out. Students were asked whether they would want to be friends with Sammy if she went to their school. Nearly in unison, all six children in Group One responded with: "Yes, Yep, Yeah" accompanied with a lot of nodding. When asked what kind of things they would do with Sammy, answers came in quick and excited succession with a focus on play and having fun—important components of friendship. Some examples of their responses reflect this:

Alice: Play. Maybe ask her if she wants to come to my house.

Lionel: Build a snowman.

Simon: Have a snowball fight.

Alice: Cheer her up. Try to make her happy.

Researcher: How would you make her happy?

Alice: Playing games she would want and doing stuff she would like.

They went on to suggest many games and activities they would play with Sammy. Noticeable in this list are activities which take into account Sammy's enjoyments, such as making paper butterflies and writing poems. These children had paid careful attention to the story.

All students in the Group Two responded in a similar way; their responses were immediate and positive when asked whether they would want to be a friend to Sammy.

Following are some samples of their responses:

Kylie: To make her feel better, so that way she wouldn't feel so lonely.

That way she would be happy.

Susie: I'd want to have sleepovers.

Kylie: I'd want her to come over. I'd ask her for her number. I'd invite her to eat lunch. I'd ask her if she wanted to play and if she wanted to be friends.

Alex: I'd give her a cookie.

Amber: I would be her best friend.

Judging by the desires expressed to actively engage in friendship with someone who is lonely and marginalized, these children seemed ready to embrace Lewison et al's fourth dimension of critical literacy: taking action and promoting social justice (2002).

The responses from children in Group Three were surprisingly different than those from Groups One and Two. While one student expressed compassion and a desire to be Sammy's friend, four of the children voiced reluctance to do so. Of the four, one had initially said he would be her friend, but then he changed his mind as seen in the following dialogue:

Researcher: Sheldon, you said you wanted to be friends with her. Tell me about that.

Sheldon: Ah, well, half and half. I would want to be a friend to her, but I wouldn't really be a friend.

Annie: That makes no sense! [indignantly]

Researcher: Well, sometimes, just like Sammy had lots of mixed up feelings, sometimes we do too. So I am interested in hearing what you mean by that.

Sheldon: I wouldn't want to hang out with her, but whenever you talk with her or something, try to cheer her up or something.

Morgan responded with, "Hmmm, let me think here. If my friend had a mother in jail then I'd probably be nice to her, but she wouldn't be like my 'friend friend'." This is the difference between being friendly and being friends. They were willing to be friendly, but more hesitant to engage in friendship. Both Morgan and Sheldon were moved by Sammy's loneliness, felt for her, and wished her well. To offer friendship however, seemed beyond their comfort levels.

Annie focused on the aspect that Sammy would be a new student, and talked about how mean new kids can be. Meaningful conversations may also be risky conversations as quickly became evident; the discussion took a brief turn when an unpopular newcomer was mentioned by name, and others readily echoed their dislike for this student. When I asked Annie to put herself in the shoes of a newcomer, she reflected on a place she sometimes went where she waited among strangers for her caregiver. "I have to go there sometimes and all the kids are really nice." She added that this felt good.

When asked whether they would invite Sammy to join them in their games and activities, Courtney from Group Three expressed eagerness to do so, and appeared genuinely empathetic toward the struggles that Sammy faced. Some of the others needed more convincing, as seen in this example:

Annie: I um, so some of the new kids this year are having trouble with [describes a game] and um, Sammy might be bad at it, and like if some of the kids that are bad at it and their feelings get hurt because some of the other kids tease them about how they're terrible at it and they're better at it. So sometimes they go tell the teacher. And that's what might happen to Sammy.

Researcher: It might. But I suppose it could also happen that she discovers a game that she really likes, right? Do you think that might also be possible?

Annie: Yeah.

It was difficult for Annie to see things from Sammy's perspective and she needed help to do so. Though most of this group was not ready to offer unequivocal friendship to Sammy, the topic of this story had unsettled them. They felt compassion for Sammy, but they also felt fearful to reach out in friendship.

Though the children warmed up to and liked Sammy's mom once they came to know her, they were still uncomfortable with the fact that she is in jail, and this colored their desire to be a friend to Sammy. (It is interesting to note that when one of the children suggested that the mother might be in jail *accidentally*, all of the children in Group Three were more comfortable with the idea of being Sammy's friend.) When asked about being a friend to

Sammy, over half of them were caught in the middle. Brett's response represents this dilemma well. Brett clearly enjoyed the story. He was positive about it from the very beginning, interrupting with, "I like this book" and again mid way through, "I like this. I like this book so far." Yet he became uncomfortable with some of the questions like, "Would you want to be Sammy's friend?" He said he would want to be her friend, but not too close a friend to her. When he was asked to explain himself, this is the dialogue that followed:

Brett: Because her mom is in jail and she might be a criminal.

Researcher: Who might be a criminal?

Brett: Her mom! Cause she's in jail.

Even though no one felt that Mom's incarceration was Sammy's fault, it still caused apprehension about a general willingness to befriend Sammy, as indicated by Morgan's comment: "...she might follow through with her mom or something." The conversation with Brett continued:

Researcher: So if you say, "No, I wouldn't want to be her friend because her mom's in jail", can you tell me what you mean by that?

Brett: K, maybe I got a different reason, but maybe I just like got lots of friends and I just got enough.

Researcher: You have enough friends?

Brett: Or maybe I could have some more, but...

I sensed an internal struggle. Early in the story (before the students were aware that Sammy's mother was in jail), Brett said that he really liked the story. Despite the fact that aspects of the story troubled him, at the end he was still positive about the story as seen in this interaction:

Researcher: Tell me what other kids your age would think about this story?

Brett: They would like it. [Unhesitatingly]

Researcher: Yeah? Tell me why? Did you like it?

Brett: Yeah!

Researcher: What did you like about it?

Brett: I like it because it's like a good story, and um it's ... yeah. I like it.

It's a good story.

Researcher: What is good about the story?

Brett: Well, there's a butterfly.

The Role of Literary Hooks in Critical Literacy

Brett had made numerous comments regarding butterflies throughout the discussion. For example, he commented on all the butterflies on Sammy's dress, with a cheerful, "I know why the butterflies like her. Cause she's nice. She helps the butterflies. She feeds them every day." His awareness of the migratory patterns of monarchs and his enjoyment of butterflies in general were apparent throughout the reading. For example, when a monarch is first seen resting on the bench at the bus stop, he interrupted enthusiastically, "That's rare. And we saw like a monarch caterpillar on our yard before and that's still rare, cause they usually like, go to Mexico!" Though Brett had been challenged with some uncomfortable ideas, the butterfly offered a point of connection to the story that may have helped to sustain his positive feelings to the end:

Researcher: How would you feel if your teacher would read this story to your class?

Brett: Oh yeah, I'd like that!

Brett was not alone in connecting with the aspect of butterflies in the story. A number of other children in this group expressed knowledge of and interest in the life cycle of butterflies. The group expressed distress at the thought of Sammy wanting to catch and restrain the butterfly, and as an alternative Morgan suggested, “Maybe the butterfly follows her everywhere. And then she feeds it, and it becomes her pet.”

When children in all three groups were asked whether Sammy reminded them of somebody they know or of a character from a book, responses from children in Groups One and Two showed that they understood Sammy’s struggle. The idea of separation from a loved one resonated with them as they gave examples of the death of a pet, the death of a grandparent, and the loss that comes through divorce. Someone also shared a memory of a person they knew who was in jail. In Group Three however, the responses to this question were quite different, and the connection to the butterfly once again emerged. Sheldon said, “She reminds me of, I forget the story, someone, who likes animals cause she likes butterflies.” Connecting to Sammy’s struggle may be incomprehensible to the children in Group Three as they were unable to name any person— real or fictional—that reminded them of someone from the margins of society. The experiences and daily realities of these children in this middle class neighborhood school are very different than those from the more economically depressed community, serviced regularly by Child and Family Services. Learning about issues such as the one Sammy faces and learning to understand and identify with this story character, especially if it feels uncomfortable, may take some time, and may require other avenues of connection to the story for some children—and interestingly the butterfly seems to have been that point of connection for many in this group.

Teachers might be encouraged to look for points of connection that children identify with, using such opportunities to explore deeper themes. For example, themes of freedom and constraint and their impacts might be talked about in relation to the butterfly in this story. Discussions about the benefits of confinement (the chrysalis) versus the harm of confinement (catching and restricting a butterfly's flight) could then be connected back to both Sammy's mother and her physical confinement as well as to Sammy and the social isolation she may be experiencing. Using points of connection identified by the children themselves have the potential to be used as effective avenues that lead back to and explore important themes such as Sammy's feelings of loneliness.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The question that I set out to explore in this research project was whether or not a picture book can help children to understand and be empathetic toward children such as Sammy, a child of an incarcerated parent. Consistent with studies showing that children are able to empathize with others at a young age (examples include: Dixon et al., 2013; Smith-D'Arezzo and Thompson, 2006), children who participated in this study expressed empathy toward Sammy. Though I found that these children all grew in their understanding and empathy toward Sammy, the starting points of the group participants were not the same. That is to say, the experiences and understandings of the world of poverty and incarceration appeared to be quite different from one group to another. Those from the community with a lower socio-economic demographic readily expressed empathy for Sammy, as seen particularly in their desire to befriend her. Though children from the middle class community expressed reluctance to befriend Sammy, they actually experienced the greatest perceptual shifts as can be seen in Figure 1 (page 70). Feelings of empathy among these children were still evident. For example, these children not only articulated Sammy's mixed emotions and feelings of sadness, they also expressed their own sadness for her. Even while expressing their reluctance to befriend Sammy (for reasons that included fear), other avenues of "help" for her were offered. Though many of their suggestions to help Sammy were neither realistic nor helpful (and in some cases would be harmful), the study reveals that the children were touched by Sammy's plight. Their lack of knowledge and their fearfulness show the need to develop greater awareness of the issues surrounding incarceration and its impact on children.

That a lack of experience affects one's ability to be empathetic is consistent with the findings of Dever et al. In their 2005 study, *Using picture books as a vehicle to teach young*

children about social justice, they compare children's responses to Hoffman and Binch's *Amazing Grace*, a story of an African-American girl hoping for the main role in a school play and Bunting's *Fly Away Home*, a story of a young homeless boy living in an airport with his father. Though Dever et al make a point of saying that both of these stories generated empathetic responses from children, they also add:

Children were better able to put themselves into the character of Grace than the homeless boy which may have assisted them to become advocates. This is probably because the context of a classroom and participation in a school play were within their realm of experiences, while living in an airport was not. The children in this project had never experienced homelessness any more directly than perhaps observing homeless people in their communities. Even then, they may not have been aware of what they were observing. Furthermore, they may have easily identified with Grace if they had personally experienced hurtful remarks from classmates. (p. 21)

Similarly, the concepts of both poverty and incarceration seem to be far away from the experiences of the children in Group three, and they will need to hear more stories with such themes to grow in their empathy. The study also reflects the need to support and encourage children to be friendly and to reach out in friendship to others.

The study highlights the important role that broadly compelling and appealing story elements, sometimes referred to as "literary hooks," play in maintaining student interest. The more such hooks that are available, the better a chance that children will find an avenue of connection, which will help to ensure that everyone is able to relate to the story at some level. For example, while some children felt at a loss to understand Sammy and her mother's

reality, they connected with the theme of the butterfly (in this case, the butterfly is the ‘hook’). When I wrote *Sammy’s Visit*, I incorporated references to fairy tales, poetry, and ecology (butterflies) in part to offer teachers several avenues to other conversations that could be had with students. I was delighted when—without any prompting of a teacher—I saw the children engage independently and with obvious pleasure with some of these motifs in the story. Critical literature will challenge students. While it is important for students to be challenged, stories that are too far from the reality of children make the stories too inaccessible for them. Students need to be pushed slowly, with patience and with gentleness. Connection points or hooks can allow teachers to focus on other areas of interest in a story, while giving the challenging themes the time they need to be processed. Some children will require more vicarious experiences through literature to give empathy time to grow and develop. Murriss (2014) points out that since children have not had a lot of experiences, vicarious experiences can be offered to them through picture books. Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) remind us that reading books with believable characters helps children to grow in empathy.

Besides text, illustrations are another important avenue to engage readers, offering connection points to the story. I was immediately attracted to Korchinski’s child-like drawings for *Sammy’s Visit*, thinking that children would find them relatable. Many children commented on how much they liked the drawings. Some children asked me to go back and forth from page to page so they could compare facial expressions, the pictures on the wall, and other details in the story. Very likely it is the illustrations of the butterfly and Sammy’s childlike delight with butterflies that captured the interest of the students as much as it did.

All of this has huge implications for teachers. Teachers need to know their students and know what their interests are so they can encourage their students to pursue such topics of enjoyment. This in turn creates an atmosphere that allows teachers to introduce to their students new and perhaps uncomfortable themes in hopes of advancing student understanding and empathy. According to Noddings (2005) and Freire (1970), knowing our students is foundational to effective teaching; taking the time to know our students, helps to build trust. Trust is needed for students to feel safe, especially when they are asked to venture into unknown or uncomfortable territory. For example, when students in Group Three were asked who would want to be a friend to Sammy, Sheldon looked around and joined others in putting up his hand. When I asked him to elaborate on this, he looked embarrassed, and changed his answer to, “Ah, well, half and half. I would want to be a friend to her, but I wouldn’t really be a friend.” This caused a response of mild ridicule from another student: “That makes no sense.” I needed to assure him—while explaining to the girl who ridiculed him—that just like Sammy, we all have mixed feelings at times. Sheldon seemed to relax and was able to express himself more freely saying that he would be nice to Sammy, while admitting he wouldn’t really want to hang out with her. Assuring Sheldon that mixed feelings are normal is what seemed to help him to feel safe, and I believe this allowed him to be more honest about his feelings. Murris (2014) says that picture books should not be used as a platform to moralize. Teachers should not get in the way or short circuit the process of students trying to understand their emotions. Only when students have a sense of understanding their own emotions, can we help them to move forward.

Next Steps

Discussions around incarceration and its impact on children and learning have not been a part of the dialogue in many education circles. Furthermore, though implementing read-aloud story sessions such as *Sammy's Visit* in Canadian classrooms has the potential to introduce exciting and authentic conversations with students, such conversations are not without risk. For these reasons, it is possible that teachers may not be prepared to lead such discussions with children. Teachers need to be supported in order to do so. Valuable follow-up workshops could be done to help teachers and principals develop a better understanding of the needs of children of incarcerated parents while gaining clearer perspectives on how they might best support these students. This would be followed up with walking teachers through the story, *Sammy's Visit* along with the guiding questions.

Questions asked both throughout the reading of the story and following the reading of the story elicited valuable responses from students that resulted in rich dialogue. Questions that students were asked throughout the reading of the story can be seen in Appendix C. These questions are intended to elicit insights into children's thoughts and understandings throughout the reading. They are also intended for children to think about their own thought processes and to consider their own emotions. I also stopped throughout the read-aloud whenever children had questions or comments or expressed unexpected ideas. For example, the first group enjoyed the butterfly poem so much that they asked me to re-read it. I liked this idea, and suggested they help me. The poem's form consists of four stanzas: in the first a question is posed to the butterfly; in the second the butterfly answers; in the third another question is put to the butterfly; in the fourth we hear the butterfly's final response. I proposed we read it together, as a "dialogue." I read, asking the questions while the children, taking on the role of

the butterfly, responded to me, and then we reversed roles; I answered the questions that they asked. This was fun for the students, and so I repeated this activity with the following groups as well. The children were now quite familiar with the poem as they not only heard it, but recited it, not once but several times near the beginning of the story. This made for an even more effective closure, since the closing two lines in the story mirrors the final stanza of the poem. I would encourage teachers to add this active component to the reading of the story.

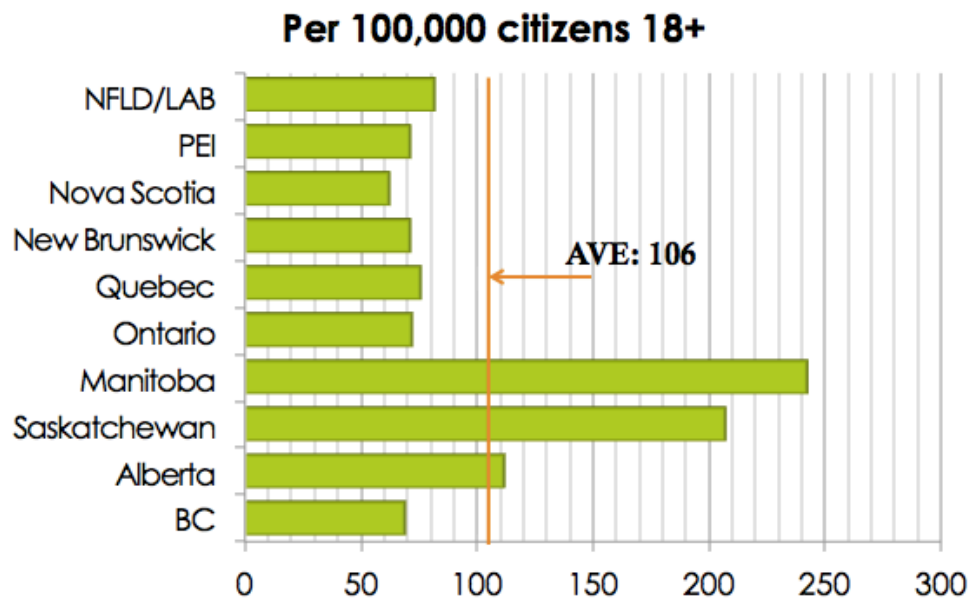
I would encourage teachers to guide their students in discussions using the questions found in Appendix D. It is important to note that these questions are general in nature, allowing the ensuing discussion to go in one of several directions. Children need to be guided in the discussion, taking into account where they are at in their understanding and comfort level of this topic. Some will be able to handle more challenging conversations than others will. When teachers sense engagement and readiness, they might ask children more probing questions. It is my hope to develop a teacher's guide to accompany the story, *Sammy's Visit*.

As the incarceration rate in Manitoba remains the highest of all provinces across the nation, we as educators must do everything in our power to help the children of those in custody to be successful. Stories that focus on the experiences of children who are marginalized not only authenticate their realities, but the use of such literature can develop greater awareness among those who are not personally impacted by parental incarceration. When discussions are guided with sensitivity and care, such awareness can lead to greater understanding and empathy among children. Helping principals and teachers to understand the value of implementing this piece of critical literature and supporting teachers to that end would be an important next step in helping to meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Teachers would then be better equipped to support their students to grow in

understanding and empathy toward the needs of these children, so that together they might create an ethic of care and a climate of inclusivity for all.

Appendix A

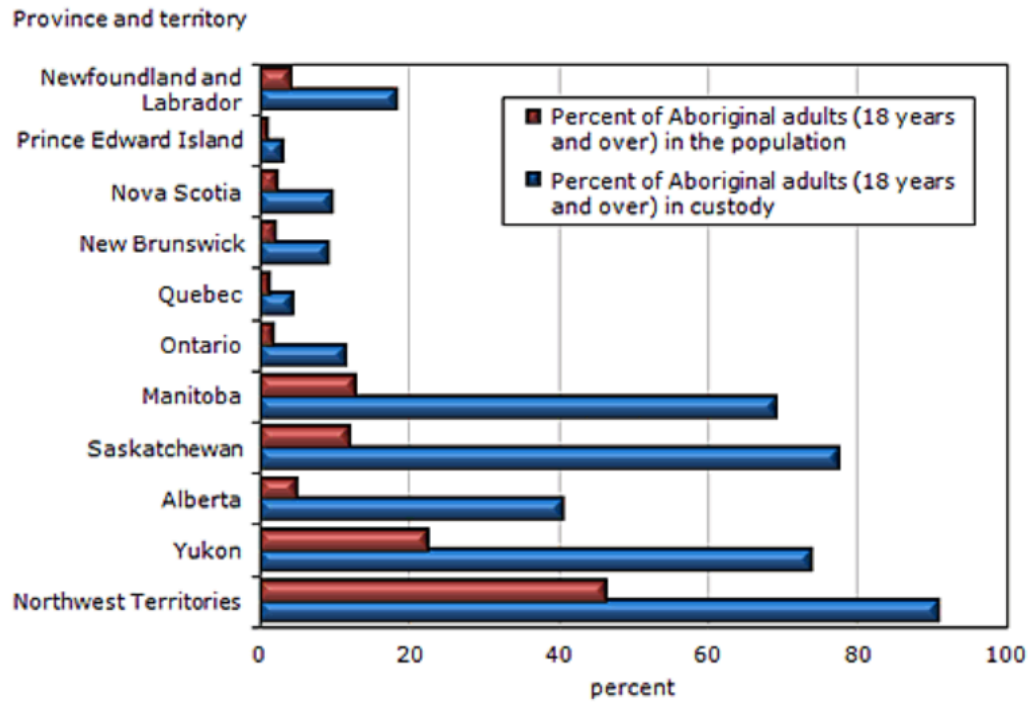
Provincial Incarceration Rates: (2015/2016)



<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14700/tbl/tbl01-eng.htm>

Appendix B

Percentage of Aboriginal Adults in General Population vs Custodial Population: (2010/2011)



<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11715-eng.pdf>

Appendix C

Story: Sammy's Visit

(Note: The italicized portions in the story below are questions that were posed to students during the read aloud. These questions form part of the Focus Group Guided Questions, most of which are seen in Appendix D.)

Sammy's Visit (Text Only)

Author: Val Plett Reimer

Illustrator: Mo Korchinski

Cover page: I gave students time to look at the cover page and asked them what they thought the story would be about.

“Grandma, I don’t want to visit Mom tomorrow,” said Sammy as she shuffled, barefoot, into the kitchen of their tiny apartment.

Her Grandma stood, bent over a pot on the stove, stirring the vegetable soup she'd made from scratch. She stroked Sammy's hair. "But you were looking forward to wearing your butterfly dress, remember? Better have some soup so you can get to bed early."

"Ok," sighed Sammy as she sat down and stared at the bowl of soup that Grandma placed in front of her. Earlier that afternoon she'd watched Grandma shred potatoes, carrots, and beets for the soup. Now, as the delicious smells and rich colours blended together, she couldn't tell the vegetables apart.

Ask: What do you know about Sammy? What do you know about Grandma?

Eating Grandma's soup always made Sammy feel better. "It's yummy," she said as she emptied her bowl.

"That's because it's 'stone soup,' like the story your mom read to you last time," teased Grandma, trying to cheer up her granddaughter.

Ask: "Does anybody know the story of stone soup? What can you tell me about Sammy's mom? What do you notice about her grandma?"

"Hmm," mumbled Sammy, smiling slightly.

When Sammy woke up the next morning, she hardly touched her breakfast. The first Sunday of the month used to be her favourite day and one she looked forward to all month, but today she felt sad.

Ask: "Why do you think Sammy is sad?"

She pulled the faded orange and green dress over her head, feeling the fabric folds of fluttering butterflies settle over her skin.

“Let’s go, Sammy. Your mom is looking forward to seeing you.”

“I’m coming,” said Sammy as she plodded to the door.

Sammy and Grandma crossed the street, and stood waiting for the bus when a monarch butterfly spread its wings and settled down on a bench beside them. Sammy’s face brightened up.

“Grandma, look at the butterfly! Let’s catch it. It could be a present for Mom.”

“It’s beautiful,” said Grandma, “but catching a butterfly would make your mother sad. Did you know it has already spent a lot of its life in the dark? It lived in a cramped cage called a chrysalis. While it was in this dark and lonely place, it was becoming a beautiful butterfly. Now it is free. Shouldn’t we help it stay that way?”

Sammy bent down to look more closely at the butterfly. As she absorbed its delicate, brightly coloured orange wings, with their black, ink-like markings, she began to chant:

Butterfly, butterfly,
Whence do you come?

“I know not, I ask not,
Nor ever had a home.”

Butterfly, butterfly,
Where do you go?

“Where the sun shines,
And where the buds grow.”

Sammy’s mother had read this poem to her many times during their Sunday visits. She loved the sound of the words and often chanted the lines when she was by herself.

Re-read the poem with the students with an emphasis on the sound of the words. Re-read it where the teacher asks the question and the students answer, as though they are the butterfly. Try this again, reversing roles.

Suddenly the butterfly caught a breeze and Sammy watched it lift and fly away.

Sunday was a day filled with waiting. When the long bus ride was over, they waited for a taxi because the bus didn't take them as far as they needed to go. It was lunchtime and they were hungry, so while they waited, Grandma and Sammy ate the tuna sandwiches that Grandma had made. Since tuna was Sammy's favourite, Grandma picked it up whenever it was available at the local food bank.

Ask: What does this make you think?

When she finished her sandwich, Sammy clasped her thumbs together, unfurling and fluttering the rest of her fingers to imitate a butterfly. She swayed her arms back and forth as she continued to chant the verse:

"I know not, I ask not,
Nor ever had a home."

It was Grandma's turn to look sad. "A good home is important," said Grandma, putting her arm around her granddaughter. "I hope I am giving you a good home, Sammy."

Sammy gave her grandma a hug. She knew she had the best grandma in the world, but she missed her mom.

What are your thoughts about Sammy? Her grandma?

When her mother had been taken away, Sammy had cried every night, counting, always counting the days till the next visit. But the last little while had been different; sometimes she didn't want to go visit her mother. Each visit meant she would have to say goodbye again. Her feelings were so mixed up, kind of like the ingredients in Grandma's soup; it was hard to tell one ingredient from the other as the soup simmered in a single pot.

Ask: What can you tell me about Sammy now? What do you know or think about her mother? How does this make you feel?

When the taxi arrived, they climbed into the back seat, and the driver drove down the familiar road lined with hemlock and cedar trees. At last the car stopped in front of the towering chain-link fence of the Cedar Lake Women's Correctional Centre.

Carefully counting her coins till she had the exact change, Grandma paid the driver.

Ask: What do you think? What might this mean? (Taking note whether students pick up on the financial struggles of this family, as seen in counting out "exact change")

Then, hand in hand, she and Sammy made their way to the entrance. Her feet felt heavy and she felt her stomach tighten. Sammy felt shy as she approached the gates that separated her from her mother, and she pressed in closer to Grandma.

Ask: What are your thoughts now? (Taking note of children's initial thoughts of jail, of Sammy's nervousness regarding jail, etc.)

They were met by a friendly guard and taken through a set of heavy doors. While Grandma signed their names, the guard smiled at Sammy. “Look at all the butterflies that have landed on you,” said the officer cheerfully. She looked carefully through Grandma’s bag and then led the visitors to a sparsely furnished room.

Soon another door opened. “Sammy!” cried Anna anxiously as she wrapped her arms, first around her child, and then around Grandma. Sammy looked down at the floor, shoulders drooping.

When Grandma pulled out a few favourite picture books from her handbag, handing them to her daughter, Sammy slowly curled up beside her mother on the couch. Nervously, stroking her child’s long, cinnamon coloured, Rapunzel-like hair, Anna opened a book. They were ready to be swept into fairyland where everything has happy endings.

“Mom,” said Sammy when the story was finished, “We saw a butterfly at the bus stop. It made me think of our butterfly poem.”

Anna looked at her daughter with tenderness. “Some day my little girl will grow up and spread her wings, just like the butterfly, and fly away.”

Sammy could only think of staying with her mother and asked, “Will you fly with me?”

“Yes, Sammy. Some day we will both be butterflies and fly away.”

She imagined having wings and flying away. Chanting a line from the poem, she asked her mother playfully, “Butterfly, butterfly, where will we go?”

Her mother smiled, and answered with the warm words Sammy was eagerly awaiting,

“Where the sun shines, and where the buds grow.”

Ask: What are you thinking about now?

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Focus Group

Guided questions After Story

1. What do you think about the story? What were you thinking about as I read it?

2. I wonder what sorts of feelings Sammy has. What do you think?

3. Have you ever had similar feelings?

4. Does Sammy remind you of anyone you know or any other characters from other books?

5. What would you want to ask Sammy?

6. If you could, what would you do to help Sammy (to feel better – depending on how they answer #2)?

7. I wonder how you would feel if your mom or dad went away for a long time.

8. If Sammy went to your school, would you want to be friends with her?
Why or why not? (Ask what activities they'd do or things they'd talk about)

9. How might other kids your age think about the story?

10. How would you feel if teachers would use this story in your class?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E



Research Ethics and Compliance
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APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

September 29, 2016

TO: Val Plett Reimer (Advisor: Zana Lutfiyya)
Principal Investigators

FROM: Lorna Guse, Acting Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2016:074 (HS19902)
"Using Children's Literature to help develop Understanding and Empathy toward Children of Incarcerated Parents"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only and will expire on September 29, 2017.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

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