

LIT LIBERATION JUNIOR

Pilot Implementation Summary

Executive Summary

Lit Liberation Jr. is a story-based resilient regulation program that helps young children develop emotional literacy, coping strategies, empathy, relationship skills, mindfulness, problem-solving, and resilience through meaningful engagement with children's literature.

During this early implementation phase, Lit Liberation Jr. was delivered through approximately 20 facilitator-led, 45-minute learning experiences documented from January through September. Each session followed a consistent instructional structure:

Literature → Connection → Explicit Skill Instruction → Practice → Reflection



Children engaged with carefully selected picture books and then applied the central skill through guided conversation, movement, sensory exploration, art, dramatic play, construction, and other hands-on experiences. Across the documented sessions, children practiced naming and communicating emotions; noticing body cues; using coping strategies such as breathing, stretching, counting, and pausing; considering others' perspectives; building confidence and belonging; persisting through frustration; and finding positive experiences and connection.

The pilot demonstrated that Lit Liberation Jr.'s instructional model can be implemented consistently across a broad range of texts and social-emotional learning objectives while remaining concrete, engaging, and developmentally appropriate for young children. A key strength of the model is that literature creates psychological distance: children can first explore a character's emotions, choices, or challenges before connecting those ideas to their own experiences and practicing a related skill.

This retrospective review is based on facilitator documentation, photographs, activity artifacts, and session descriptions. It was not designed as a formal outcomes study; therefore, it does not claim measurable causal effects on children's regulation, social-emotional competencies, or resilience. Instead, it provides promising preliminary evidence of feasibility, instructional coherence, active child participation, and the value of advancing Lit Liberation Jr. into a more systematic school-based pilot.

Lit Liberation Jr. is built on a simple belief: stories can help children build the skills they need to navigate real life.

Turning stories into strength.

Empowered kids. Braver choices. Brighter tomorrows.

Turning Stories Into Strength

Lit Liberation Jr. is a story-based resilient regulation program designed to help young children develop emotional regulation, social-emotional competencies, coping strategies, and resilience through meaningful engagement with children's literature.

Grounded in **Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading**, Lit Liberation approaches literature as more than a vehicle for comprehension instruction. Stories create opportunities for children to make personal connections, consider perspectives beyond their own, explore emotions in psychologically safe contexts, and practice skills that can transfer beyond the text and into their everyday lives.

The Lit Liberation Jr. pilot documented here was implemented with young children in an early childhood setting across multiple months. Sessions combined interactive read-alouds with guided conversation, explicit social-emotional and DBT-informed skill instruction, movement, creative expression, sensory experiences, and hands-on practice.

The retrospective review of documented sessions suggests that Lit Liberation Jr. was feasible to implement through a consistent, developmentally appropriate instructional structure and provided children with repeated opportunities to engage with emotional literacy, coping, empathy, identity, relationships, mindfulness, problem-solving, and resilience.



Pilot at a Glance

The documented pilot included **approximately 20 literature-based learning experiences**, with implementation documented from approximately **January through September**.

Sessions were designed as approximately **45-minute, facilitator-led experiences** and generally followed a recurring instructional sequence:

Literature → Connection → Explicit Skill Instruction → Practice → Reflection

Rather than using children's books simply to introduce a topic or accompany a craft, Lit Liberation used the events, characters, conflicts, and emotional experiences within literature as the entry point for explicit skill development.

Children were then given opportunities to **do something with the idea**: identify an emotion, consider another person's perspective, practice a coping strategy, move their bodies mindfully, solve a problem, create something, communicate an idea, or reflect on their own experiences.

What Children Experienced

Across the documented implementation, children encountered a broad range of developmentally appropriate texts and learning experiences.

Literature	Primary Learning Focus	Documented Application
<i>I Am a Tornado</i>	Emotion identification, body awareness, coping	Children represented emotions through color and yarn and explored breathing, coloring, counting, and stretching as calming strategies.
<i>A Place Inside of Me</i>	Emotional literacy, multiple emotions, empathy	Children explored how colors can represent different emotions and created heart collages representing feelings they can hold at the same time.
<i>Looking Like Me</i>	Identity, self-awareness, belonging	Children explored their names, identities, and what makes them unique through self-portraits.
<i>Eyes That Kiss in the Corners</i>	Self-worth, identity, connection	Children discussed qualities they value in themselves and others and created self-reflective artwork.
<i>Hey Black Child</i>	Confidence, identity, possibility	Children created star-themed artwork centered on their strengths, creativity, confidence, and potential.
<i>A Chair for My Mother</i>	Resilience, hope, perseverance	Children discussed working together toward a goal and created money jars representing something meaningful they might save for.
<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	Emotional expression, imagination, regulation	Children explored how big feelings can feel "wild" and used creative expression to design their own Wild Things.
<i>Becoming Blue</i>	Identity, creativity, social connection	Children experimented with color mixing while discussing individuality and connection with others.
<i>Jabari Tries</i>	Frustration tolerance, persistence, DBT STOP	Children practiced STOP and applied persistence and problem-solving during a hands-on construction activity.
<i>My Big Bad Monster</i>	Thoughts, emotional regulation, coping	Children externalized difficult thoughts by creating "big bad monsters" and changing their appearance to make them feel less overwhelming.
<i>Waiting for the Sun</i>	Mindfulness, sensory awareness	Children practiced noticing through the five senses and participated in a berry-themed fine-motor activity.

<i>The Empty Pot</i>	Honesty, courage, integrity	Children discussed doing the right thing even when it is difficult and planted seeds while reflecting on growth.
<i>Wild Peace</i>	Mindfulness, slowing down, calm	Children practiced breathing and used creative experiences to explore peace, reflection, and mindfulness.
<i>Yoga, Here I Come!</i>	Mind-body regulation	Children practiced yoga poses and stretching as strategies for calming their bodies and managing strong emotions.
<i>Saturday</i>	Disappointment, coping, positive experiences	Children discussed coping when plans change and created puppets connected to finding joy despite disappointment.
<i>Those Shoes</i>	Empathy, perspective-taking, wants vs. needs	Children discussed what it means to understand another person's experience and created shoes representing ways they could support others.
<i>A Girl Can Build Anything</i>	Growth mindset, problem-solving, confidence	Children became "engineers," building structures and practicing persistence, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.
<i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i>	Frustration tolerance, persistence, STOP	Children practiced pausing, observing, and proceeding thoughtfully when something became difficult before creating their own "magnificent things."
<i>I Got the Rhythm</i>	Positive emotions, joy, connection	Children created heart shakers and used music and movement to practice experiencing and sharing joy.
<i>Never Let a Unicorn Scribble</i>	Empathy, perspective-taking	Children discussed first impressions, differences in perspective, and how another person may experience the same situation differently.
<i>The Way I Feel</i>	Emotion identification and vocabulary	Children named emotions, examined facial expressions, and created emotion faces to represent different feelings.

Core Areas of Skill Development

Although individual lessons focused on particular concepts, several developmental strands appeared repeatedly throughout implementation.



Emotional Literacy & Regulation

Children repeatedly practiced identifying, naming, representing, and communicating emotions. Lessons moved beyond labeling basic feelings to helping children recognize that emotions provide information, can coexist, may have physical or observable cues, and can be responded to intentionally.

For example, *The Way I Feel* asked children to identify emotions and consider what they might look like on someone's face. *I Am a Tornado* extended this into recognizing intense emotions and choosing strategies for calming the body. *A Place Inside of Me* introduced the more complex idea that people can experience multiple emotions.

Together, these experiences created repeated opportunities to build the language children need before they can effectively communicate and regulate emotional experiences.

Coping & DBT-Informed Skill Development

Several sessions moved from talking about feelings to explicitly teaching children **what they can do when emotions become difficult to manage**.

Children practiced strategies including breathing, stretching, counting, movement, sensory awareness, mindfulness, creative expression, and pausing before responding.

The DBT **STOP** skill appeared explicitly within documented lessons such as *Jabari Tries* and *The Most Magnificent Thing*.

In developmentally accessible language, children practiced:

S — Stop

Pause before reacting.

T — Take a step back / Take a breath

Create space between the feeling and the response.

O — Observe

Notice what is happening internally and externally.

P — Proceed mindfully

Choose what to do next thoughtfully.

This is an important distinction within the Lit Liberation model: children are not merely told to "calm down." They are introduced to **specific strategies they can practice before those strategies are needed during moments of dysregulation**.

Empathy, Perspective-Taking & Relationships

The pilot also provided repeated opportunities for children to think beyond their own experiences.

In *Those Shoes*, children explored wants versus needs and considered how a peer might feel when they do not have something others possess.

Never Let a Unicorn Scribble provided an opportunity to discuss first impressions and how one's own thoughts and feelings can affect how another person is understood.

Other stories encouraged children to recognize emotions in others, communicate support, celebrate peers, and consider different perspectives.

This reflects an important feature of the Lit Liberation approach: **literature provides psychological distance.**

Children can first consider:

"What is happening to this character?"

before being asked:

"Has something like this ever happened to me?"

or:

"What could I do if this happened?"

That progression allows social-emotional learning to emerge naturally through the story.

Identity, Self-Worth & Belonging

Another strong strand within the documented implementation involved positive identity development. Texts including *Looking Like Me*, *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*, *Hey Black Child*, and *Becoming Blue* provided opportunities for children to explore who they are, what makes them unique, and what they value about themselves and others.

Activities included self-portraits, identity exploration, strength-based artwork, color exploration, and discussions about confidence and possibility.

These experiences expand the concept of resilient regulation beyond managing difficult emotions.

Resilience also involves having a sense of identity, belonging, competence, connection, and belief in one's own capacity.

Resilience, Persistence & Problem-Solving

Persistence emerged repeatedly across the pilot.

A Chair for My Mother explored perseverance, hope, collaboration, and working toward a meaningful goal.

A Girl Can Build Anything placed children directly into a problem-solving experience through engineering and construction.

Jabari Tries and *The Most Magnificent Thing* connected frustration with the opportunity to pause, regulate, reconsider a problem, and try again.

Saturday addressed a different aspect of resilience: coping when circumstances cannot simply be fixed. Children explored disappointment and the possibility of finding positive experiences even when events do not unfold as expected.

Taken together, these experiences introduced resilience not as simply "being tough," but as a collection of teachable processes:

cope → pause → problem-solve → seek connection → find meaning or positivity → try again.

Mindfulness & Mind-Body Awareness

Mindfulness was incorporated in concrete, developmentally appropriate ways.

Rather than relying primarily on abstract instruction, children practiced mindfulness through **movement, breathing, sensory exploration, art, and play.**

Waiting for the Sun used the five senses to encourage noticing and present-moment awareness.

Wild Peace connected imagination and breathing with feelings of calm.

Yoga, Here I Come! provided an embodied experience in which children practiced stretching, movement, and yoga poses as strategies for helping the body slow down.

These experiences reinforce the idea that regulation is not exclusively cognitive. Young children can learn to recognize and influence emotional states through their bodies.



Positive Emotions Matter, Too

An especially valuable feature of the pilot is that Lit Liberation did not focus exclusively on managing negative emotions.

I Got the Rhythm intentionally centered **joy, movement, music, connection, and positive experiences.** Children created heart shakers and then participated together in a classroom heart parade.

Other lessons addressed pride, confidence, hope, creativity, belonging, and enjoyment.

This reflects a broader resilience framework in which emotional wellness involves not simply reducing distress but also **building positive experiences, relationships, meaning, mastery, and connection.**

Evidence of Developmentally Appropriate Implementation

The documentation provides strong evidence of **active participation in the instructional experiences.**

Across sessions, children can be seen or were described:

- participating in interactive read-aloud experiences and conversations;

- creating representations of emotions and ideas through art;
- practicing breathing, stretching, yoga, and mindfulness;
- building and problem-solving;
- using sensory materials;
- participating in movement and music;
- creating collaboratively and independently;
- practicing explicit coping and regulation strategies; and
- connecting ideas from literature to themselves and other people.

Activities varied substantially while the underlying instructional model remained consistent. That combination is important.

The routine was predictable; the experience was novel.

Children repeatedly encountered the process of story → conversation → skill → practice, while the hands-on application changed according to the text and learning objective.

The Lit Liberation Instructional Model

One of the clearest findings from this retrospective review is the emergence of a consistent instructional architecture across the pilot.

1. Literature

A high-interest children's text introduces an authentic emotional, interpersonal, identity-related, or resilience experience.

2. Connection

Facilitated discussion helps children make meaning from the story and connect characters' experiences to emotions, relationships, choices, and their own lives.



3. Explicit Skill Instruction

The underlying resilient regulation skill is named and taught directly. This may include emotional vocabulary, perspective-taking, mindfulness, coping, DBT-informed strategies, communication, problem-solving, or resilience skills.

4. Practice

Children apply the concept through developmentally appropriate experiences such as art, movement, sensory exploration, dramatic play, construction, mindfulness, or collaborative activity.

5. Reflection

Children return to the central idea and consider how the skill may apply beyond the activity.

Stories become the bridge between an abstract skill and a child's lived experience.

Connection to Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

The pilot also provides an applied illustration of the theoretical foundation from which Lit Liberation developed.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory conceptualizes reading as an interaction between reader and text in which meaning emerges through the transaction rather than existing solely on the printed page.

Lit Liberation intentionally creates opportunities for children to transact with literature around emotionally meaningful questions:

What is this character experiencing?

What do I notice?

How does this connect to something I know or feel?

What might someone else experience differently?

What could this character do?

What could I do?

The literature therefore becomes both a literacy experience and a context for developing emotional and interpersonal understanding.

What This Pilot Can—and Cannot—Tell Us

The documentation supports several conclusions about **implementation**, while important limitations should be recognized.

The pilot demonstrates that Lit Liberation Jr. can be delivered through repeated, literature-based experiences incorporating explicit skill instruction and developmentally appropriate hands-on practice. The documentation also shows that children participated in activities spanning emotional identification, coping, mindfulness, empathy, identity, positive emotions, persistence, problem-solving, and resilience.

However, this retrospective summary is based primarily on facilitator documentation, photographs, social-media descriptions, and artifacts rather than a predetermined research protocol.



There were no standardized pre/post measures included in the materials reviewed here, no comparison group, and no systematic behavioral outcome measurement from which causal conclusions could be drawn.

Therefore, this summary **does not claim that participation in Lit Liberation caused measurable improvement in children's emotional regulation, SEL competencies, or resilience.**

Instead, the pilot provides **preliminary implementation evidence** supporting the feasibility of the model and informing the design of a more systematic future pilot.

Preliminary Implementation Findings

Across the documented implementation, several patterns warrant continued evaluation.

Feasibility. The same core instructional model was implemented across a wide variety of children's literature and social-emotional objectives.

Breadth. Children were exposed to skills across multiple domains rather than receiving a narrow emotion-identification intervention.

Active practice. Skills were not confined to verbal discussion. Children practiced concepts through movement, sensory experiences, art, construction, mindfulness, and play.

Repeated exposure. Concepts such as emotion identification, coping, mindfulness, empathy, persistence, and perspective-taking appeared across multiple texts and contexts.

Integration. Literacy served as the organizing context for social-emotional and resilience instruction rather than SEL functioning as a separate add-on.

Developmental accessibility. Abstract concepts—including mindfulness, perspective-taking, resilience, and DBT-informed skills—were translated into concrete experiences appropriate for young learners.

These findings provide a strong rationale for moving from this early implementation phase into a **more formally evaluated pilot**.

Conclusion

The Lit Liberation Jr. pilot demonstrates the potential of children's literature to function as more than a read-aloud or discussion starter.

Across months of documented implementation, stories became opportunities for children to explore emotions, identity, empathy, relationships, coping, mindfulness, persistence, joy, and resilience—and then **practice those ideas through experiences designed for young learners**.

The most consistent feature across the pilot was not a particular book or activity. It was the instructional process:

Read it. Connect to it. Learn the skill. Practice it. Carry it beyond the story.

That is the foundation of Lit Liberation Jr.

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