

A Case Study of Harmony Third Edition Across Four Districts

Chapter 5: Storybooks

by Nick Yoder, PhD, Whitney Impellizeri Cignatta, EdD,
and Karryll Winborne-Phillips, PhD



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Introduction: Storybooks

Harmony Academy helps students develop skills and competencies to facilitate relationships, particularly with those who may be different from them (e.g., based on achievement, interests, gender, and race and ethnicity). One approach to facilitate the formation of meaningful relationships with diverse others is through Storybooks, particularly for students who are in more homogenous groups. Stories can showcase individual characters' unique selves, while also creating a common group where everyone belongs (Cameron et al., 2006). Harmony Storybooks, originally in the Pre-K to Grade 2 curriculum, provide opportunities for students to explore what it means to be a friend by following the adventures of Z—a space being who crashed-landed on Earth—along with the Clubhouse Friends. The Storybooks further introduce students to social and emotional concepts and skills in lessons through reading the stories and using the provided guided discussion (Martin et al., 2017).

In the Storybooks chapter, we provide high-level findings from the Harmony Third Edition case study about how educators perceived and implemented the refreshed Storybooks. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the following:

- Educators' Experience of Harmony Third Edition—Storybooks (research question 1)
- Storybooks to Meet the Needs of All Students (research question 2)

First, we provide an update on the refresh of the Storybooks, as well as concrete recommendations based on the findings. Following, we provide an overview of the methods of the project. Finally, we

explore the data to discuss educators' experiences along with the perceived needs met through using the Storybooks.

Refreshed Storybooks

In Harmony Third Edition, the Storybooks were enhanced based on educator feedback (Jodl et al., 2020), as well as additional literature on how stories can promote inclusivity in classrooms (e.g., Cameron et al., 2006). In the following section, we describe the enhancements made to the Storybook characters—Z and the Clubhouse Friends—as well as to the structure of the Storybooks.

Storybook Characters—Z and the Clubhouse Friends

Storybooks are a tool to teach about friendship broadly as well as the social and emotional skills needed to develop meaningful relationships. When Harmony started the refresh, educators generally reported that the Storybooks' primary character, Z, a space being who needs to learn how to be a good friend, was a favorite among students. Stories continue to involve the Clubhouse Friends (previously known as the Treehouse Friends in Harmony Second Edition), who help Z learn about friendship through everyday issues and problems that Z and the Clubhouse Friends encounter, as well as answer Z's inquisitive questions.

In the refresh, the Storybooks incorporate a larger and more diverse group of groups—12 Clubhouse Friends plus Z. Each Storybook character has their own unique experiences and backgrounds while belonging to the same group—the Clubhouse Friends. For instance, Mia loves nature and is bilingual, Jeremy has autistic characteristics and writes in his journal a

¹ This report is a series of papers that provide critical insights into how Harmony Third Edition has been used across four districts. The series of papers includes: (1) Executive Summary, (2) Getting Started with Harmony, (3) Student Outcomes, (4) Everyday Practices—Meet Up and Buddy Up, (5) Units, Lessons, & Activities, (6) Storybooks, and (7) Appendix. We want to thank the educators, students, and district leaders who participated in piloting Harmony Third Edition, as well as the Harmony staff and partners who worked on supporting the refresh of the program.

lot, Maddie enjoys robots and is a picky eater, and Alo enjoys art and planting in his community garden (see Figure 1 for an image of the Clubhouse Friends).

By having Clubhouse Friends with diverse experiences and interests, students are able to learn about similarities and differences within a group. Further, more students are able to see themselves within the Storybook Characters, allowing them to connect to the stories and SEL concepts within Harmony.

Storybook Structure. In Harmony Third Edition, Harmony staff enhanced the look and feel of the Storybooks and provided connections to the lesson concepts. For instance, the stories' wordiness was decreased, the layout enhanced, and the illustrations

and appearance sharpened. Similar to the Units, Lessons, & Activities, the Storybooks are now grade-specific for each lesson in Pre-K to Grade 2, and because of the high demand for stories, they now include unit-specific stories for Grades 3 through 5. Harmony staff also ensured that the Storybooks maintained their alignment to the lesson (or unit for upper grades) skills and concepts, allowing educators to still use Storybooks as a way to introduce the lesson social and emotional skills and concepts.

Further, students can now access the Storybooks in multiple ways: they can read them individually, they can have the educator read them, or the platform can read the books to the students in both English and Spanish.

Figure 1. Z and the Clubhouse Friends



Recommendations

Through the surveys, focus groups, and observations, we were able to revise the program in real time. We were also able to determine key recommendations for educators and administrators on how to use the Storybooks:

- 1. Use Storybooks as a tool to introduce lesson concepts and principles.** The Storybooks align with the lesson success criteria and targeted social and emotional competencies. The Storybooks provide a way to help make the competencies and lesson concepts come to life for students and help build background knowledge.
- 2. Bring Z to life in the classroom.** Students love Z. They find Z to be engaging and enjoy helping Z learn how to be a better friend. Z becomes their friend through the Storybooks, as students also learn to help Z through the friendship mishaps and questions that Z has about what makes a good friend.
- 3. Connect the Storybooks to students' lives.** The situations that Z and the Clubhouse Friends get into are situations that students can relate to. Use those situations, even ones that students may

not have experienced, to learn about interests, experiences, and backgrounds of those who are similar and different to them. The Storybooks are meant to help students connect SEL to their own lives.

- 4. Find time to embed Harmony Storybooks with academics.** Harmony Storybooks are a great tool to support reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. By asking questions during and after the lesson, this allows students to deepen important reading comprehension skills such as characterization, prediction, and inference. Likewise, stories include new vocabulary that educators can use throughout the day. And because the Storybooks are short and have a read-aloud option, this allows students to practice their fluency skills with Storybooks they find engaging.

Methods

As part of the Harmony Third Edition development process, Harmony partnered with four districts¹ that received early access to the refreshed Everyday Practices (Meet Up and Buddy Up) and two units of the Units, Lessons, & Activities, and Storybooks. Educators received two site-based trainings—one on the refreshed Everyday Practices and one on the Units, Lessons, & Activities. Most participating educators across the four districts offered feedback on their experiences with Third Edition through surveys (n=61²) and focus groups (n=51) in April and June 2022; and 34 educators participated in classroom observations (in-person or video) in April and May 2022³ (see the Case Study Appendix for a more detailed description of the methods).

- 1 Harmony partnered with 3-6 schools per district, for a total of 17 schools and 88 educator volunteers (from Arizona, Iowa, Texas, and Wisconsin).
- 2 61 educators completed the full survey; 63 educators completed part of the survey; n=number.
- 3 Only high-level notes and feedback are provided from the classroom observations that are relevant to research question 1; this data was not systematically analyzed, but rather used to understand how Harmony was operating in classrooms and to make revisions to the Harmony Curriculum and implementation rubric.

Key Findings

Based on survey and focus group results and anecdotal observation notes, educators and students responded favorably to the refreshed Storybooks. Below we describe educator experiences of Storybooks, and how they are used to meet student needs.

Educator Experiences of Storybooks. The first research question asked, “How do educators experience Harmony Third Edition?” Because the case study focused on the refresh, Harmony Academy wanted to ensure that the program felt recognizable, including the Storybooks. In fact, from survey responses, educators recognized most of the content from Harmony Second Edition; 93% of educators in the survey (strongly) agreed that the content in Harmony Third Edition was recognizable compared to Harmony Second Edition. Of the educators who used the Storybooks,⁵ 81% (strongly) agreed that they were useful to introduce lesson SEL concepts, and 68% (strongly) agreed that the Storybooks are interesting and engaging to students (see Figure 2).

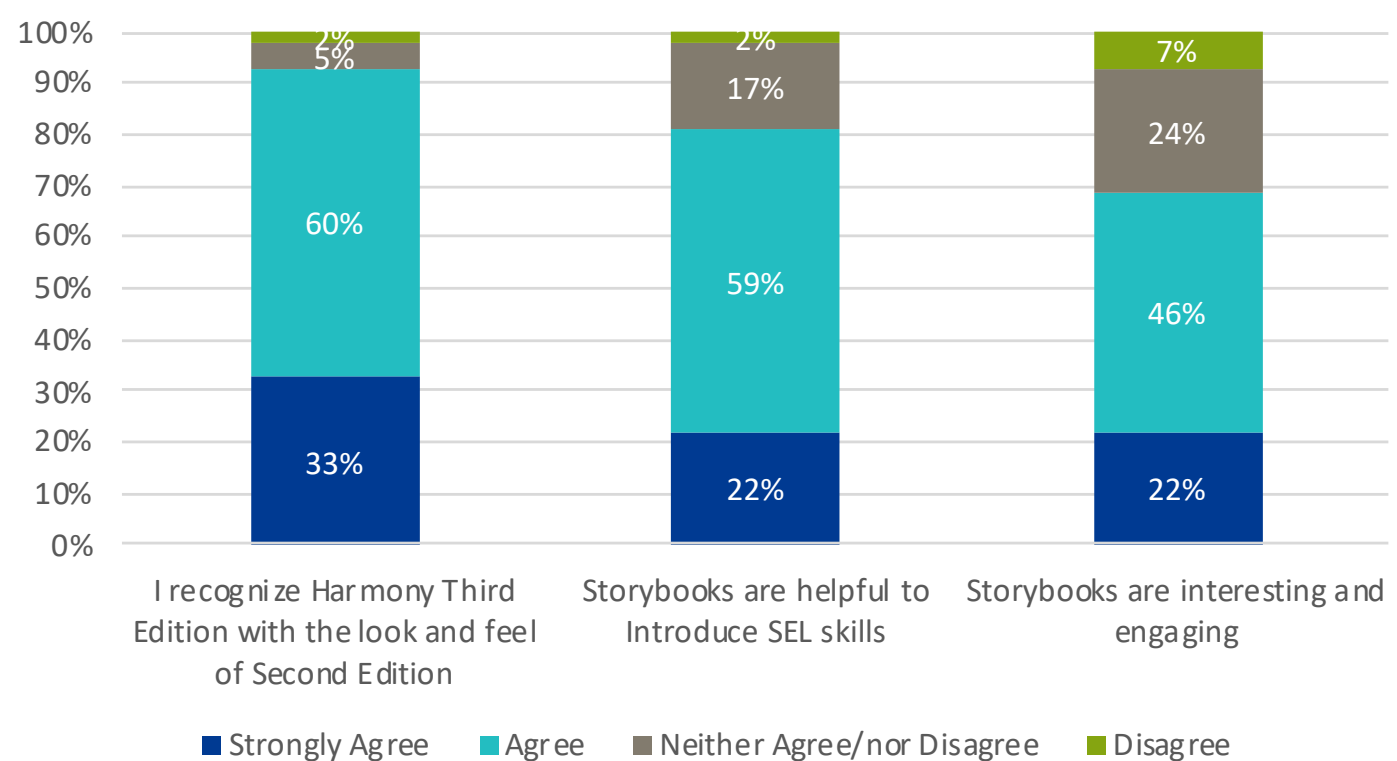
During focus groups, educators stated that their students appreciated Z to support skill development and that the stories were shorter. For example, a kindergarten teacher shared that her students were excited to use Harmony Third Edition and meet Z.

Another kindergarten teacher noted her students’ engagement while reading the stories, stating, “For the most part, my kids are always very engaged. They love Z; they’re obsessed with Z, and they want to build Z homes during playtime.” A second-grade teacher appreciated that the stories were refreshed in a way that was developmentally appropriate for older students as well as younger ones.

During the few times Storybooks were observed, observers noticed that educators and students were engaged during the Storybooks. The educators used the questions included both at the conclusion of the story as well as created their own questions throughout the story to help introduce the lesson concepts and skills. They also used questions to help connect the stories with experiences that the students have had or with feelings or thoughts that they may have in similar situations, and to identify strategies they would use to continue to build relationships.

Storybooks to Meet Student Needs. The second research question asked, “To what extent do educators report that Harmony Third Edition meets the needs of all students?” Educators across surveys and focus groups responded favorably that Harmony Third Edition met their students’ social, emotional, and

Figure 2. Educator Experiences using Storybooks



academic needs. For example, educators reported in the survey that Harmony Third Edition was very or somewhat effective in building positive relationship skills (97%), creating feelings of belonging (95%), and improving peer relationships (89%), among many other outcomes (see Chapter 2: Student Outcomes for more information).

Educators noted that the Storybooks and Z helped build peer relationships and community. For instance, a kindergarten teacher shared that her students were always highly engaged with the lessons and especially loved Z because, “. . . Z teaches them how to get along with people who are different.” Educators noted that their students appreciated the diverse group of Clubhouse Friends. For example, another kindergarten teacher explained that her students enjoyed the diversity represented in the characters, “I think it’s nice for them to see all of the different characters in the stories as well.” A special education teacher noted that her students could, “. . . find themselves in the characters.”

Similarly, educators found Z and the Storybooks as proactive ways to support students’ social and emotional development. Educators thought that Z’s experiences and challenges represented real-life situations that are relatable to younger students. A kindergarten teacher stated, “I like the themes [in the stories] and using Z. My students are excited to use the stories. I like that the stories bring in real-life situations in a cute story form.” A third-grade teacher explained, “I like the stories that go with the lessons. The characters have similar interests and problems that students face in the classroom—it’s relatable.”

Educators also noted the ways in which the Storybooks could be used for academics. For instance, a fourth-grade teacher explained, “I like the inclusion of vocabulary. I’ve used that as our word of the week in our morning meeting or our morning message.” A fifth-grade teacher noticed that her students were struggling to remember all the Clubhouse Friends, so she created an anchor chart and “. . . turned [the Storybooks] into a literacy lesson.” Another fifth-grade

teacher explained, “We’re doing more than activities. It provides students with tools and the steps to move through. Harmony Academy has done a better job with the vocabulary, and it’s tightly aligned with SEL competencies.”

Overall, educators and students alike continued to enjoy Z and the Clubhouse Friends within their SEL journey. They were further excited that Storybooks

provide an avenue to bring in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency skills. Finally, they were looking forward to having these stories incorporate a read-aloud feature, as well as be translated into Spanish.⁶

6 Note: At the time of the focus groups, the Storybooks were not yet translated into Spanish nor had a read aloud function.

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