Book Review of Torey Hayden's *One Child*

Sara Davis

University of North Texas
Abstract

This paper reviews the book *One Child* by Torey Hayden and explains the teaching methods used in the book. Torey's relationship-based teaching style helps her to bond with her students.
Book Review of Torey Hayden's One Child

Torey Hayden, a teacher of children with emotional and behavioral disorders, teaches a class called the “garbage class.” This class consists of children who do not fit into the other specialized classes—classes for the emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped, behaviorally disordered, and learning disabled. Torey's class consisted of the leftovers. It is while teaching this class that Torey meets Sheila, a terribly emotionally disturbed child who is first seen as difficult and hard to work with. Torey, however, does not give up on Sheila and employs a teaching style that is different from those of her peers. Torey employs a relationship-based teaching style rooted in commitment and interpersonal relationships that focuses on her relationships with the students and also the students' relationships with each other. As Torey begins to build a personal relationship with Sheila, the girl becomes more manageable. Sheila's change is sparked by Torey's desire for Sheila to change.

Book Summary

Sheila's physical appearance when she first entered Torey's class was very disheveled and unkempt; her clothes were dirty, her hair was knotted, and she smelled of urine. She was also very unmanageable, often throwing tantrums and erupting into violent outrages. She even killed the fish in the tank by gouging out their eyes. Torey approached Sheila's behavioral problems by talking to her and allowing the girl to slowly warm up to her. After a while, Sheila began talking to Torey, and not too long after that, Sheila was able to speak up in class. Sheila was also hesitant to do school work. Torey worked with her individually until Sheila was ready, and after a little while of close working with Sheila, she was ready to work with math blocks. Thanks to Torey's tireless effort and dedication, Sheila eventually performed surprisingly well in the area of math. After Sheila's first academic success, Torey was eager to see just how smart Sheila actually was. Torey administered to Sheila a picture vocabulary test that would roughly show what IQ Sheila had. Sheila performed very well and expressed an IQ of around 180.
Upon discovering her student's true potential, Torey worked with Sheila every day after school. The first time Sheila stayed after, Torey helped her to clean her up a little by brushing her hair and giving her hair clips. Their after school meetings continued and Sheila slowly began talking and bonding with Torey. They would talk about the class day and about Sheila's home life. Sheila's mother had given birth to her at fourteen and had recently abandoned Sheila and her father and took Sheila's little brother, Jimmy, with her. Before Sheila had come to Torey's class, Sheila had tied a neighborhood kid to a tree and burned him. After that, Sheila was admitted into a state hospital, but until there was an opening, Sheila was placed in Torey's class. Sheila's father did not like accepting “charity,” and would send back any clothes or items that Torey would send home with Sheila. From then on, Torey would help wash Sheila and comb her hair every day before school, and wash her clothes once weekly, which helped immensely with Sheila's confidence and appearance.

Sheila began behaving better in class and also had fewer and fewer outbursts. Sheila would still act out violently on occasion, even destroying another teacher's room, but Torey showed patience to Sheila and diligently worked with the girl despite some set backs. Torey continued to work with Sheila, going as far as taking Sheila out shopping with her and buying Sheila new clothes. Torey brought her boyfriend along for the shopping trip and Sheila asked if he liked Torey, he confirmed and Sheila claimed that she liked Torey, too.

On one occasion, in one of their after school lessons, Torey read the story of *The Little Prince* to Sheila. Sheila felt impacted by the story making the connection that she was the fox in the story and that Torey was the prince who tamed her.

Torey was confident that Sheila had truly begun to make progress until one day when Sheila came back to class wearing her same old clothes and had seemed to digress. After questioning her worsening behavior, Torey found out that Sheila had been molested by her uncle who had come for a visit. After he was unable to rape her, he raped her with a knife. Sheila was badly injured and
bleeding. Torey rushed her to the hospital where Sheila stayed for a month. Torey visited her daily.

After this incident, Torey kept up her constant regimen of connecting to Sheila on a deeply personal level, beyond that of the average teacher-student relationship, and by the end of the school year, Sheila was a completely different person. Sheila was behaving well and she was excited to come to class and learn. Sheila was hesitant to leave Torey and go on to a regular third grade class the next year, but Torey assured her that they would stay in touch.

Favorite Part of the Book

My favorite part of the book was where Torey met with Sheila after school one day to read her the book *The Little Prince*. After reading, they discussed the part in the book where the prince tames the fox:

“Why do you do this?” she asked.

“Do what, Sheil?”

“Tame me.”

I did not know what to say.

Her water blue eyes rose to me. “Why you care? I can't never figure that out. Why you want to tame me?”

“Well, kiddo, I don't have a good reason, I guess. It just seemed like the thing to do.”

“Do I be like the fox? Do I be special now cause you tame me? Do I be a special girl?”

I smiled. “Yeah, you're my special girl. It's like the fox says, now that I made you my friend, you're unique in all the world. I guess I always wanted you for my special girl. I guess that's why I tamed you to begin with.”

“Do you love me?”

I nodded.

“I love you too. You be my special best person in the whole world.”
In the book, the prince explains to the fox that to tame him means to “establish ties” with him which is exactly what Torey was trying to do with Sheila. This is also what Torey's teaching theory is based off of. Her relationship-based teaching style is rooted in establishing ties with her students. I feel this part is very important to the book. The story of *The Little Prince* sparks their relationship of deep love and friendship.

I believe that books have a great impact on people. For a child like Sheila, it is good that she is able to relate to a fictional character that can help her overcome her problems. Through literature, people are able to find someone that is going through a similar situation as them and be able to learn from that character's life decisions.

**Teaching Methods**

The main teaching methods that Torey focuses on are flexibility and relationship-based teaching. Torey makes an effort to build a relationship with each of her students and is flexible to accommodate what needs to be done in order to allow each student to excel. Through Torey's love and patience, she builds a relationship with each student that is based on communication and commitment. Torey's students know that she will be there for them whatever they need. I believe Torey's teaching style is incredibly effective, as was made evident by Sheila's incredible progress. Her theories could be applied effectively to any type of classroom or students. I will use Torey's methods in my classroom to ensure that all student's succeed. I will try my hardest to build a relationship with each student and make sure that the students know that I am there to help them succeed.

I greatly enjoyed this story. It was extremely emotionally filled and I teared up multiple times while reading it. I will definitely recommend this book to my peers and colleagues who are working with diverse classes.
Bibliography