

BIBLIOTHERAPEUTIC MODELS IN CREATIVE TEACHING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract: Although the term bibliotherapy takes on special significance in the twenty-first century, bibliotherapeutic practices are as old as humankind. Although of a fictional nature, literature has always had the power to influence the psychological states of children in particular, because bibliotherapy primarily involves the oral narration of various literary genres and reading literary texts to prevent and treat certain psychological difficulties and to nurture mental health in general. This means that children, through listening to the lyrics of lullabies, at the earliest age are exposed to bibliotherapy, and while growing up and reading various literary texts, watching movies, listening to music, etc. this action only intensifies. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how children's literature in the class of Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian language and literature through adequate work of teachers can therapeutically contribute to the positive characteristics of the child's personality. This paper uses Gestalt therapy to examine the therapeutic effect of the text *Ashamed of his Mother* by Ivan Cankar from the reader for children in 4th grade in primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to preserve the mental health of younger pupils. In the entire bibliotherapeutic process of teaching literature, the education and creativity of teachers who teach children's literature are of particular importance, and the paper offers certain methodological guidelines for teachers of children's literature in the bibliotherapeutic direction.

Keywords: bibliotherapy, psychology, children's literature, prevention, difficulties, guidelines

The first scientific definition of bibliotherapy (Greek: *biblion* –book and *therapeia* –healing) was created in the 1950s, insight into the need for its institutionalization dates back to the end of the 19th century (Piskač, 2018). Bibliotherapy is an important part of creative arts therapy. Many publications regarding bibliotherapy have been published in the past (Xu et al., 2022) with many controversies. Namely, art therapy and bibliotherapy are both subfields in the creative/expressive arts world of therapeutic practice (Wright, 2023) as well as music therapy, etc.

The word bibliotherapy, as an old concept in library science, also is associated with other names such as book therapy, reading therapy, creative writing therapy, poetry therapy, or therapeutic storytelling, which, in addition to describing the nature of bibliotherapy, could also be called its different methods. When it comes to bibliotherapy – book therapy with the aim of improving or nurturing mental health – the terms *bibliotherapy in the narrower sense* (clinical bibliotherapy) and *bibliotherapy in the broader sense* (developmental bibliotherapy) have been mentioned more and more recently. Some authors call them explicit and implicit types of bibliotherapy, and some classify them into three groups: clinical, developmental, and institutional. Although they are sometimes scientifically imprecise because there is often too thin a line that separates them or they intertwine, the mentioned terms also appeared due to widespread debates about who can perform bibliotherapy practices and whether bibliotherapy is just „one of a series of old-new names“ for what we all have always known, and that is how books can heal us and nurture our mental health (until the advent of paper and different forms of books, these were oral genres in literature).

It could be said that *bibliotherapy in the narrower sense* is today mostly practiced by psychologists and psychiatrists, but also different rehabilitators (who work closely with psychologists and psychiatrists as well), because such bibliotherapy mostly uses fictional or non-fictional texts as instruments in the treatment of specific mental illnesses, conditions, or difficulties. Namely, bibliotherapy includes not just fiction, however, and some forms have an instrumental rather than aesthetic orientation (Tangerås, 2020: 2).

Bibliotherapy viewed in this way has its great advantages and disadvantages. A great advantage is that the general mental state, difficulty, or just a problem of the person who is undergoing bibliotherapy is certainly set precisely, that an expert in the field of mental health or rehabilitation can make a clear potential diagnosis or difficulty and expertly monitor the course of treatment or rehabilitation (bibliotherapy also has its particularly significant place in the rehabilitation practice of children and adults too).

However, bibliotherapy is almost never used in psychiatric institutions, psychological counseling centers, rehabilitation centers, etc. as the main method of therapy, but one of a number of different types of help, i.e. an auxiliary method in psychotherapy or rehabilitation. The fact is that for severe psychological conditions, diseases, and various difficulties, bibliotherapy must be only an auxiliary tool. However, in practice, we often encounter the problem that psychologists, psychiatrists, and rehabilitators need additional education in the psychology of literature

and sociology of literature, librarian studies, but also in creative writing, etc., all of it for the more serious and independent practice of bibliotherapy.

It is an education that for high-quality bibliotherapy work requires detailed knowledge of many literary works and sometimes even artistic talent for writing, and not only basic knowledge of well-known bestsellers or classics. True, literature and psychology are two branches of science that study the human soul (Can Emir, 2016), but still, they are very different. Literature is always fiction. Psychology is not. On the other hand, even if such at least modest knowledge exists on the part of psychologists, psychiatrists, and educators-rehabilitators, their independent bibliotherapy practice usually has low aesthetic qualities, because their focus in treatment usually does not include a path through the aesthetics of literature which also provide great healing power, etc. Yet there are ways of mediating literature in which the very attention to the aesthetic dimension brings about medicine for the soul (Tangerås, 2020: 2).

Bibliotherapy in the broadest sense in the simplest terms, implies what we have always known about the therapeutic possibilities of books, and not only books from the field of literature but in general. For some people, theological and religious texts have a distinct bibliotherapy effect, while for others it is text from the field of history or sociology because such texts also can heal some people in a way of complete relaxation, rest, and escape from everyday stress. In this sense, it could be said that every man or woman is his own bibliotherapist almost every day. In a broader sense, bibliotherapy is especially practiced by professors and teachers of literature, librarians, and writers, but also among sociologists, theologians, early childhood and elementary school teachers, etc. This type of bibliotherapy practice does not aim to deal with mental illnesses, diagnoses, various conditions, and difficulties, but mainly to nurture mental health precisely to prevent more serious problems, but also milder forms of anxiety, etc.

Namely, the book ennobles the ordinary reader, pupil, and student, because education makes him/her a more self-aware person, more confident in himself /herself, etc. Since a long time ago people have looked for answers to various problems and difficulties in books. Also, in different books, they have also found peace, tranquility, rest, relaxation, escape from loneliness, etc.

Oral literature has always had a highly emphasized bibliotherapy character. The literary genre of lullabies, proverbs, and jokes is the most striking proof that bibliotherapy practice, although not in the form of a book, is as old as humankind. The use of the text of a lullaby to calm a child or the use of jokes for short-term laughter or pure entertainment is also a well-planned and methodologically designed use of literary discourse in order to improve and nurture mental health, which is today also one of the definitions of bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy practice in its wider context also has its flaws, because it often remains at the level of a brief impression or „moral lesson“ without a deeper psychological analysis and the knowledge of the psychology of literature. Some authors simplify the phenomenon of bibliotherapy in schools so much, that they even claim that the term bibliotherapy should not be used at all, but the term "talk about the book" (Mikuletič, 2010: 138). This approach completely excludes all current scientific approaches and the knowledge about bibliotherapy, confirming the prejudice that the word bibliotherapy is "just one of a series of old-new names". It also imposes the greatest confusion and danger in the use of bibliotherapy in schools, because if bibliotherapy is just a „talk about a book“, bibliotherapy in practice, (even as „only developmental“ bibliotherapy) could and should, only and exclusively, be performed by literature teachers and professors and that is far from the truth. Namely, no matter how simple it can sound, talking about a book“ is never just talking, especially not for teachers in literature who teach children's literature in schools. Although it's true that teachers in schools have long been using various methods from psychology in classes on the analysis of literary works, and often did not even know what they were called, that does not necessarily mean that these classes were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the relationship between literature and psychology, especially in schools, must change because, unfortunately, it is often based only on one's own superficial impression of the psychological background of the text.

To specify, the truth is that bibliotherapy is as old as humankind and that (as stated above) is best demonstrated by the oral genres in literature, but it is impossible to ignore all the knowledge from psychology, psychiatry, rehabilitation, sociology, etc. that interdisciplinary combined with literature gives the best results today. Even in primary schools or kindergartens.

All this tells us that in order to give the best results, bibliotherapy practice must be extremely interdisciplinary and that even one bibliotherapy session should be guided or methodologically planned, designed, and supervised by at least two different experts (for example: a psychologist and teacher of literature, a psychiatrist and professor of literature, an educator-rehabilitator, psychologist and writer, a psychologist and librarian etc.).

However, all of this is very difficult to implement in bibliotherapy practice, even in the most developed countries, but still, detailed interdisciplinary planning that includes the work of different experts, designing and using different library methods for work on bibliotherapy sessions, interdisciplinary analysis of collected data, etc. are very possible

and desirable, even if bibliotherapy is performed in practice by only one person – an expert from one field that includes bibliotherapy in the narrower or broader sense.

Bibliotherapy hides its great untapped potential in children's literature, because children from preschool age (through listening to stories), and especially in early school age (when they learn to read) and in all grades of primary school, must experience the beauty and benefits of bibliotherapy. Children's literature often contains different types of ideologies (Pašić Kodrić, 2021), which also need to be discussed in classes that include elements of bibliotherapy.

This paper wants to show precisely that bibliotherapy must be an integral part of the planning and organization of classes in the primary school courses of mother language and literature, and that developmental bibliotherapy must be an integral part of the work of a teacher in early school age. Therefore, bibliotherapy should be an integral part of children's education especially, because learning about the benefits of bibliotherapy in early school age has a great chance of becoming a life practice of children in childhood, but also in the future because this way in adult age bibliotherapy can be applied as a self-help method to address psychological distress, boredom, and isolation (Sharma, 2023).

In order for classes on the courses of mother language and literature in primary schools to take place through bibliotherapy, certain criteria and very high standards must be met:

- a) Bibliotherapy could be offered as a separate independent course at all educational faculties;
- b) Professors at educational faculties in the fields of literature, psychology, sociology, and inclusion must offer interdisciplinary knowledge about bibliotherapy to future teaching staff during their studies. The reason why bibliotherapy is not enough promoted in educational universities and faculties could be seen in the rigid division of bibliotherapy into clinical and developmental, where „no special knowledge“ is required for developmental bibliotherapy.
- c) Teachers who already work in primary schools should, first of all, be educated on issues of bibliotherapy. Today it is very simple because it is also possible to attend bibliotherapy courses online;
- d) Although literature classes in themselves are extremely therapeutic, certainly not in all, in some children's literature classes, the focus must be exclusively on bibliotherapy, which implies pre-planned psychological methods that can be applied to a literary text. The help of the school psychologist in planning such classes, as well as his presence at them, would give the best effect of such classes. Teachers in primary schools, regardless of their level of knowledge about bibliotherapy, should plan all their lessons that involve the use of bibliotherapy in advance, in consultation with the school psychologist. This should be easy because all primary schools have their own psychologists.
- e) Teachers who already work in primary schools should be offered various scientific works on bibliotherapy with concrete bibliotherapy advice, but also examples of texts they are familiar with and which they already analyze in children's literature classes.

In this paper, we want to show how Gestalt therapy as psychopathology of the situation (Lobb & Cavaleri 2023) can be used in bibliotherapy, in a primary school course on mother language and literature, which in Bosnia and Herzegovina is called Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, language and literature. Gestalt Therapy is considered to serve as a foundation of interactive bibliotherapy because it's obvious that fiction books can be a significant stimulant of personality transformation (Girčienė & Žukauskienė, 2022). In the Reader for the fourth grade of primary school, there is a famous text by the Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar *Ashamed of his Mother*, and it is a short story about a boy who does not accept his mother from the countryside at school in the city because of her physical appearance and the way she dresses their low socio-economic status. The mother came to pick up the boy from school, he acted as if it was not his mother because he was embarrassed by her general appearance.

– *Isn't that your mother? – his friend asked him.*

– *No, that's not my mother! Joža replied.*

He was ashamed of the peasant skirt dotted with green flowers, the high boots, the red dress, and the scarf, and the umbrella, and the big bundle; and in that bundle were his new shirts that motherly sewed and on which her tears dripped. (Cankar, 2007: 90)

The boy Joža later repented that he was ashamed of his mother, he thought about whether he should confess to her what he had done, but he did not, but that sin against his mother in this story continued to haunt him throughout his life.

In terms of its content, this story is an ideal discourse for the application of Gestalt therapy in bibliotherapy, because it talks about the unresolved concerns of the boy Joža that follow him later in life, about his deep pain that he was ashamed of his own mother, anxiety, resentment and other negative emotions and states that followed him throughout his life only because of one "childish sin". All these deep emotions and states in Ivan Cankar's story

"Ashamed of his Mother" cannot be „only discussed“ in the children's literature class, but all these emotions and states of the boy Joža must be actively expressed with pupils in the present through guided reading. These are just some of the questions that could be asked in the class, and since the questions are extremely sensitive and imply entry into deep privacy, pupils can answer them anonymously on pieces of paper that will be placed in a common box, and the catchphrase of the class could be to call „My deep confessions on paper“.

- Can you imagine at this moment that you are the boy Joža?
- Are you angry with Joža for being ashamed of his mother?
- Can you understand and sympathize with him today?
- Do you remember the situation when you were ashamed of one of your family members?
- Confess on an anonymous piece of paper who you were ashamed of.
- Do you feel bad about it now?
- Can you forgive yourself for that now?
- Try to find a justification for your subjugation: how would you justify yourself?
- Do you think it's bad that Joža suffered a lot throughout his entire life just because of one childish sin?

The continuation of the class could go in the direction of the public reading of anonymous messages from students, and considering that bibliotherapy classes do not always take place in children's literature classes, a school psychologist could sometimes attend such classes or at least help the teacher in preparing such a class. In addition to the fact that the pupils would certainly feel better and more relieved, the results of these questions would be very useful for the teacher as well, because maybe in this anonymous way, it would be discovered that there are children in the class who show anxiety, even more difficult issues, etc.

This is just one of many short examples of how, in fact, it's very easy to discuss a literary text on a much deeper and higher level in children's literature classes and how much an interdisciplinary approach to bibliotherapy is the best way to get the best therapeutic results. It is very important to build children's awareness of the importance of self-discovery through the fiction of children's literature. Also through familiarization with the bibliotherapeutic features of children's literature, because children's literature, and literature in general, not only educates and nurtures, it also heals (Pašić Kodrić, 2023). Because of all of the above, bibliotherapy must be an integral practice of children's literature classes in all schools, but interdisciplinary and understood through different knowledge from different fields that give the best therapeutic effect as a well-organized and planned system.

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