



Bibliotherapy and Possibilities of Intervention in Problems of Child Psychopathology

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Abstract

Bibliotherapy comes to connect the impossible with the possible. To give the subjects solutions that were not in their minds until that moment. The purpose of this study within the literature review is to highlight how a book works therapeutically for children under specific intervention conditions. More specifically, an attempt is made to capture the action potentials of the book in each subjectivity and in our case that of children. It appears that book therapy has positive effects on children who face various difficulties in their personal lives and it is striking how some literary heroes with whom children identify can show them ways to cope with various impasses.

Keywords: *Book Therapy; Children; Heroes; Identification*

Introduction

The idea of treatment through books is not a modern innovation, as it can be found in various sources concerning the first libraries in ancient Greece. The belief that stories influence human emotions and that book can serve in the development of children by projecting role models is evident from various reports that present the use of books as therapeutic tools. In particular, sources report that the door of the library in ancient Thebes was marked with the inscription "Therapeutic Hospital of the Soul" (Pardeck, 2013), while Aristotle's observations on the effect of drama on the viewer led him to coin the term "catharsis" to describe emotional release. Highlighting the influence of books on one's emotions, Shakespeare wrote about Titus Andronicus: "Come and pick through all my library, and so deceive your grief" (Act IV, Scene I) (Afolayan, 1992).

It was Samuel Crothers, in 1916, who first used the term 'bibliotherapy', meaning the use of books for therapeutic purposes; a term derived from the Greek words book and therapy (Howe, 1983). Bibliotherapy aims at understanding the inner self. It attempts to achieve a kind of emotional catharsis when a reader identifies with the various fictional characters and can and does release their psychological tension and emotions (McCulliss, 2012). As Corman characteristically states, catharsis causes readers to release the tensions they experience and allows them to recognize themselves in the characters in the

book. Others argue that the release of emotional tension is itself therapeutic. As Jones, (2008) points out, books touch children more, which is why the emotional release in them is more spontaneous. Book therapy is a means by which children can cope with the difficulties and problems they face in their daily lives (Doll & Doll, 1997). Because it changes the way they think and, by extension, their behaviour. Bibliotherapy helps individuals to share common experiences and interests by d Also, books can reduce personal isolation by allowing readers to realise that other people have faced similar problems. According to (Gregory & Vessey, 2004.) it is a dynamic interaction between the individual and literature. With the aim not to understand the story completely, but as far as possible to dramatize the events and the case internally. The goals of bibliotherapy are to enrich mental representations, to better understand situations, to increase interest in interpersonal relationships and to improve the daily life of individuals (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Pola & Nelson, 2014). Bibliotherapy can be used at different levels of intervention more specifically with mentally ill people, people experiencing difficulties in their environment but much more so for preventive purposes (Stewart & Ames, 2014). Books can help individuals to question their beliefs and views on personal and social issues such as loss, relationships, fear and other existential questions (Jack & Ronan, 2008) enveloping more effective relationships.

Bibliotherapy as a Therapeutic Method

The use of books for therapeutic purposes received special and widespread application after the first and second world wars. For many soldiers returning from combat with post-traumatic disorders or symptoms, bibliotherapy was found to be efficient and effective. Since then, its use has expanded, and it is currently utilized by almost every professional who can provide counseling support to various age and social groups, including vulnerable or special populations (Pardeck, 2005). While all bibliotherapists recognize the power of books or the written word, there are differences in the type of books and how stories are used in therapy. Cognitive therapists, perceive learning processes as the main mechanisms of change and tend to use any written material that informs, educates or guides individuals (Jack & Ronan, 2008). In contrast, psychodynamic therapists focus on repressed thoughts, feelings and experiences, with the aim of enhancing emotional self-exploration and developing insight, using poetry and various emotion-rich stories (Pehrsson et al., 2007). Engaging and identifying with literary characters encourages readers' insight (Shechtman, 2009) and effectiveness when they are at a standstill.

The practice of bibliotherapy has varied in approach and focus since it was first used in the 1930s. Traditional bibliotherapy, for example, tends to prompt individuals to react positively or negatively to reading material. More recent approaches, however, assume that the therapeutic process is actually more interactive; the reader becomes part of the evolving emotional process of the story, and in struggling to understand what it communicates at deeper levels, responds by making a positive switch by modifying their behaviour or attitude (Goddard, 2011).

In the various types of book therapy that exist, such as interactive book therapy, participants take part in activities, such as group discussion, which help them to reflect and express themselves about what they are reading, and by extension, what they are experiencing (Suvilehto & Latomaa, 2019). In the other case of clinical bibliotherapy, qualified mental health professionals use therapeutic methods to help people who are experiencing emotional problems. Finally, developmental bibliotherapy is used by teachers in the classroom in order to help students cope with learning difficulties and problems of adjustment to the school environment. A key advantage of this approach is that it can work proactively, as teachers can identify their students' concerns and work on them (Heath et al., 2005).

Professionals using bibliotherapy, especially teachers, should be familiar with children's personality traits and problems. Many children run the risk of becoming more introverted if the intervention is not carried out properly and all the parameters surrounding the child's problem are not taken into account. Imposing bibliotherapy in such a case could exacerbate existing problems. Bibliotherapy should not be considered a panacea for all emotional problems. It has been reported that in

some cases, reading subjects with problems that are identical or related to those of the readers could have adverse effects that may exacerbate existing problems (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2011). However, it is important to note that bibliotherapy has some limitations as it is not intended for very severe emotional disorders of children or adolescents. When such conditions exist, parents should seek help from appropriate professionals who will turn to different methods.

How Children with Psychopathology Can Benefit

Given that children with psychopathology experience a range of unique needs, it is important to offer them new innovative treatment strategies. One of these is bibliotherapy as it gives children the opportunity to learn new things, to be exposed to different ways of approaching different problems and to experience alternative ways of thinking (Montgomery & Maunders, 2015).

Bibliotherapy provides children with information to help them deal with their problems. When practitioners use books for therapy, literary characters must be dealing with, in some way, a similar problem to them. Then in this case, each child can identify with a character in the book, thereby gaining awareness and understanding of his or her own motivations, emotions and thinking. By reading about the conflicts, experiences, and emotional reactions of a character in a story, children gain a clearer perspective of a problem (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013). Book therapy is also an excellent therapy technique for stimulating discussion of issues that otherwise cannot be discussed due to shame, fear, or guilt. Reading a character who has experienced a similar problem to the child's can help the child express their feelings about it (Lucas & Soares, 2013). Books can be an effective tool to help professionals in their practice with children because they are an excellent source of information by making children not feel alone and different (Lewis et al., 2015).

The positive results of bibliotherapy are unfortunately seen and highlighted in a limited number of studies but with encouraging results. Although there are several reports regarding the use of books for entertainment purposes, nothing similar happens in cases of psychotherapy (Montgomery & Maunders, 2015). In a related study by Betzalel & Shechtman (2010) regarding the use of book therapy with children with various difficulties, the results showed a reduction in anxiety and aggression in these children. In a similar study by Shechtman (2009), it was shown that children who participated in bibliotherapy groups reduced their aggression to a fairly significant extent and developed empathic traits. Some other research highlights the effectiveness of bibliotherapy for children who have experienced trauma. These positive effects can be attributed to the unique characteristics of fiction. Stories are an indirect method of intervention that children and adolescents perceive as less threatening than direct approaches (Shechtman, 2009). In addition, literary texts provide an opportunity for children to identify with human situations that are similar to those they experience themselves. Examining these events from a distance allows participants to acknowledge and accept their own difficulties. Following the stories, the therapeutic group discussion helps children explore personal issues, develop insight and awareness, and make changes. In addition, small group therapy encourages the expression of feelings in a safe climate and supports participants in dealing with their struggles. Small group bibliotherapy sessions offer participants therapeutic benefits such as universality, altruism and peer support. Children feel less lonely, that they do not deviate from the group, and that they can find personal strength through change (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010).

Book therapy with characters from literary stories offers children the opportunity to build hope for the future and take action. This requires the right choice of a book and this depends on the plot and characters, which need to show similarities with those of the child so that the child can develop mechanisms of identification and projection with them in the process (Pardeck, 1996). It is also important that older children are able to externalise their feelings as part of the catharsis process in order to release inner aspects of themselves. With the guidance of a professional, the child can identify with a character in a book who has a problem similar to their own. Through this approach, the child begins to see how the character in the book solves a problem he or she is facing, thus identifying possible solutions to his or her

own problem (Forgan, 2002). Because of developmental differences, book therapy with younger children is necessarily different from that with older children. A young child's limited vocabulary, limited vocabulary skills, range of experiences, and the short amount of time they can remain focused affect the bibliotherapy process. According to Pardeck (2005) young children are particularly affected by illustrations because pictures feed the process of daydreaming. Particularly important in this case are the characters and images of animals present in various stories, and children identify with them relatively easily (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2017).

Gillespie & Connor (1975) have identified six critical points that are useful in selecting books for therapy with younger children:

1. Attractive illustrations, either pictures or photographs, that enhance the text and feature a variety of colors.
2. Story content that assumes a logical development of events and portrays believable characters.
3. Useful information that is within the child's range of understanding.
4. Broad humor, which should be fairly obvious to the young child.
5. Elements that add surprise to maintain suspense and interest.
6. Attractive, repetitive refrain, which contributes to familiarity and pleases the child.

It should be noted that few books meet all of these criteria. However, the practitioner should take each point into consideration when selecting literature for the youngest child. Many of the above points, of course, are important and helpful for older children as well, such as humor and surprise. One of the most important criteria for choosing books for therapy is the age of the children and the special needs they have. As a general rule, children are most interested in listening to or reading characters close to their age. Preschool children will need books with lots of pictures and simple formats. In the case of school-age children, greater character development and story detail are important, while adolescents may read novels with many chapters, covering an extended period of time (Jack & Ronan, 2008).

For book therapy to be most effective, the specialist must explore the child's reactions to a book used in therapy. It is important that younger children are able to comment on pictures while someone is reading a book to them, while older children often enjoy talking about the main characters in the book. Through discussion many of these children can identify with certain aspects of the events in the story and with various emotions of the characters involved in the story (Pardeck, 2005). It is important for the practitioner to allow this articulation of the story with the subjects to occur in the place where each of them encounters something of their inner being. The message of the story in the form of speech is there and each child will become a character from the story they have just heard or read. The imagined relationship with the characters will begin to release that which imprisons it in a fixation. The practitioner need not insist on orientations in the way he understands each story but must leave the understanding on the part of the one who hears it to capture it in his own experience and impression. There he will make up something that until that moment had not passed through his perception and on these traces, if he wishes, he will continue his effort.

The Book in the Therapeutic Process, an Example of Stories with Superheroes

Book therapy is based on the assumption that through identification with the characters in a story, children find solutions to their personal problems. One such example is the therapy with superhero stories, which can empower and give children hope for the future. Superhero stories are based on the fact that they find meaning in their lives through giving back to other people (Pierce, 2015).

Bender & Lourie (1941) first examined the therapeutic utility of superhero stories, showing how identification with them can lead to ego enhancement and help with family difficulties. Lawrenc & Jewett (2002) described superheroes as mythical characters with a mysterious past and 'pure' motivations, who face challenges in order to bring freedom and salvation, not only to the world, but also to themselves. Superheroes are always in a state of saving humanity, as well as in a state of self-redemption, saving themselves from their painful past and family difficulties. They face these unfortunate challenges when they become superheroes (Betzael & Shechtman, 2017). According to Rubin (2007), rather than focusing on pathology, superhero stories suggest an optimistic future for children who are suffering and, centered on the power of superheroes, offer children options to develop positive attitudes and emotions such as optimism, hope, love, forgiveness, courage, and creativity. Indeed, the few published case studies have shown that when using clinical work with children, careful selection of a superhero based on their personality, their struggles, and the coping mechanism they use form the basis for a deep identification with the superhero's difficulty and their need to present a new and optimistic view of the future (Eliasa & Iswanti, 2014).

In superhero book therapy sessions, the stories contain various themes related to grief, trauma, personal tragedy and the power of the individual to heal themselves. In most cases, the superhero seeks hope and strives to become a positive, helpful person through altruistic acts. In these sessions, the discussion focuses on the courageous choices he (the superhero) makes to achieve his (her) goals. For example, in a therapy session, Batman's story is presented describing the "birth", the evolution, the tragedy of parental loss, the pain, grief, mourning and self-destruction the hero experiences, and finally the journey he goes through to make it through it all (Nolan, 2005). Through the development of empathy, the main character develops altruistic behaviour, struggles for others and finds the strength to offer help. The complex character of Batman is in a constant search for self-awareness for which he is reborn with the hope to move forward. The legacy of his late father and the words of encouragement he recalls, such as "As we fall? That's how we can learn to get up," guide Batman through life. Additionally, children reading this story are exposed to the dilemma of right and wrong by observing the superhero's personality and the power of choice in the situations he experiences (Betzael & Shechtman, 2017).

Children who experience significant traumatic loss, such as parental loss, may find it difficult to continue their lives normally. Presenting stories with positive and powerful models of identification that project hope and suggest choice can be particularly effective. Children understand that they are not just passive recipients of the situations they experience but are able to make decisions and take action in order to improve their own lives and those around them (Webster & Harris, 2009).

A typical example is the example of a 5th grade student who, after watching the Superman story, commented:

"He looked like such a simple, unimpressive man and yet he was so good and brave when he needed to be ... It is his inner strength that is so impressive. He's like the quiet classroom boys that everyone wants to be associated with. I wish I could be one of those guys." These heroes constantly choose to improve themselves, make the right decision and take risks to help others. The hard times they experience and the situations they face highlight their selflessness, self-denial, altruism and charity, from which their triumph emerges. The main message of these superhero stories is that by restoring faith in others, they restore faith in themselves and in their lives. In the words of Batman, Bruce Wayne, "they fall, but they learn to get up and keep going" (Betzael & Shechtman, 2017).

Discussion

The purpose of bibliotherapy is to use books to help people deal with personal and emotional problems in order to bring about significant changes in their lives. Professional therapists use the content of books according to the child's age, developmental needs and situation in order to enable him/her to

better understand the problems and difficulties he/she is facing and then to make the relevant decisions. To reach this point, children identify with the literary characters in the stories, release emotions while finding new ways to relieve their personal deadlocks. Book therapy is an evolving method, which finds application in several cases of children with psychopathology problems. It seems that bibliotherapy can work not only at the level of treatment but also at the level of prevention by enhancing subjectivity when it is tested by social bonding, helping children to cope with problems in the school, family and wider environment.

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