

## Bibliotherapy as a Tool of Education in Classroom

Namika Gumber<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Books are the richest source of knowledge to get information and learn about looking from a third perspective at the bigger picture. They assist in our growth and help build our imaginative and creative bent of mind. Bibliotherapy as creative arts modality of therapy is not just something that can be used only in the clinical settings but also in what we loosely characterize as a general and daily place of work like a classroom and school. The current review paper aims to highlight vital aspects of how bibliotherapy can be used in classrooms, especially on children and young adults as a part of our general curriculum, to help build and transform the upcoming generations as mentally healthy beings. The magnitude of impact that bibliotherapy can have on young minds to educate them more on inclusivity of different communities, learning about cultures, enhancing the social-emotional learning, and in severe cases, the use of bibliotherapy can help them identify with difficulties they face and build empathy and a sense of normalizing. Throughout, we uncover shreds of evidence of how books help kids to connect better not just with the outer world but with themselves as well. Lastly, the current review brings out further suggestions to study that can be done and how concepts like bullying, sex education, and gender identification & roles can be taught better with the help of books and teach also inclusivity to kids at a young age and broaden their horizons.

**Keywords:** *Bibliotherapy, Children, Classroom, Psycho-Education, SEL, School Counselors*

*"Reading is an exercise in empathy. To read is to enter another world in a way different from any other art form. The reader is actively participating, activating the pages of a book simply by picking it up and beginning. We discover through reading that we are less alone, as the inner lives of characters on the page become accessible to us. No matter how foreign or different a life experience might be, the writer is always saying to the reader, and the reader to the writer, me too. I've been there too."- DANI SHAPIRO*

Books and reading are probably amongst the most common words that we hear all through our lives and habits that we are encouraged to inculcate. Since childhood, be it at home or with our teachers, we are always encouraged to read, to gain more knowledge, and widen our horizons to look at the world from different perspectives and to develop a flexible lens. It is through books that one can travel the world, not just in terms of

<sup>1</sup>Student, Master of Arts (Honours) in Social Sciences with majors in Psychology, Institute of Social Sciences Education and Research, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

\*Corresponding Author

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geographical information but through language, culture, customs, religions, and art. As kids, we read and hear moral stories to learn values, ethics, and the ability to differentiate between right and wrong and what might be the consequences if we do something which is wide off the mark. When we grow up we read texts whether on our own or as a part of our school curriculum penned by authors across the world and get a better understanding of a new way of looking at things; of new ideas. In our schools we are introduced to literary texts, poems and plays, written by different authors living in different parts of the globe, in spread out time spaces, which give us an understanding of the human mind and behavior, we are taught to recognize understand the feelings of the characters, what they do and why the results of the actions they choose to do. This insight in literature helps us to make connections with ourselves, with society, and the kind of environment we live in. If we try and observe literature and or a piece of text that we read is bound to leave a mark on us, teaching us lessons if we read closely, and reflect on it. This is where Bibliotherapy steps in the picture.

Bibliotherapy is an expressive arts modality also a tool used by the mental health professionals who recommend not just reading but also in some cases audiovisual matter like fiction, non-fiction, poetry, films, podcasts; which are later on built upon as exercises for further engagement. The term Bibliotherapy was coined by Samuel McChord Crothers (1916) which originated from a combination of two Greek words, *biblion* which means Book, and *Therapeia* which means Healing. Simply put, using books (literature) to heal. By this etymological meaning, one may think that Bibliotherapy is a therapeutic technique that might be used in a clinical setting, but in a work by Rubin (1979), she states three types of Bibliotherapy- Clinical (as practiced for the emotional or behavioral problems of the client), Institutional (practiced by a psychiatrist, with doctors as facilitators), Developmental (used in schools, library or any other community setting, not just to maintain health but to nurture emotions and promote mental health with the individuals). Bryant and Roberts (1929), came up with a different variety of bibliotherapy- client developed Bibliotherapy (the type where creative modalities after reading of the text are used like writing letters, roles plays, paintings, and discussions further on the same are done according to the preference of the client). The Roots of Bibliotherapy can be traced back to Romans and Greeks in 300 BC (Jones, 2006 and Riordan & Wilson, 1989). It has surfaced from time and being in world war Hospitals; texts by Jane Austen read by the soldiers but it was officially in the 1940s the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of Dorland's illustrated Medical dictionary that Bibliotherapy was clearly defined and again in 1966 by the American Library Association and finally, it was in the 1980s-90s that Bibliotherapy was starting to catch on and more and more research were built on it and its use started to expand. In today's time and age where every child spends about 10- 12 years in school education in India, the use of Bibliotherapy in terms of developmental Bibliotherapy and Client development would act as a tool to educate kids and adolescents on topics that might seem as difficult to confront directly or abstract to teach upfront, it is where these Bibliotherapy sessions as a part of the normal curriculum would benefit. It is critical to understand that when we talk about education it is not just our basic area under discussion but something holistic so that kids not just understand themselves better but have an open and inclusive view of others as well, to value themselves, and also have an extended mindset to comprehend others as well. Now that we are acquainted with the meaning of Bibliotherapy and the context in which we want to look at Bibliotherapy as an instrument of education in classrooms, here are six objectives and goals of Bibliotherapy (Rubin, 1978)

1. To let it know to the reader that the problem is pooled by others as well.
2. Facilitate the reader to see that more than one way out is achievable.

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3. Support the reader in comprehending the motivation that individuals have when facing a similar kind of situation.
4. Assist the reader to be able to worth of experience in fellow humans, instead of the materialistic mindset.
5. Present the reader with facts that are needed to find answers for the crisis at hand.
6. To give confidence to the reader that they can tackle any type of situation realistically by preparing and executing a course of action.

### ***Education***

Before we go on and try to identify with the meaning of Bibliotherapy and its relevance as a tool of education, we need to understand what we imply by education- as John Dewey said, "Education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living". According to Dewey (1987), education is a process that has a psychological and social basis and their needs to create a balance and occurrence of the two in balance without being subordinated to one another will only lead to the true form of growth and healthy results. James, 1910 stated, "Education is *the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies to behavior*", which again draws our attention to education being holistic which is not just about learning school courses but much more than that.

### ***Bibliotherapy***

The definition, meaning, and context of Bibliotherapy have Further expanded and changed over time since it was first officially introduced in Dorland's 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Illustrated Medical Dictionary (1941), it stated Bibliotherapy is "the employment of books and the reading of them in the treatment of nervous disease." Webster's Third International Dictionary in the year 1961, defined Bibliotherapy as "the use of selected reading materials as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and psychiatry; also, guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading." The same definition was accepted in 1966 by the American Library Association. According to Zaccaria, et.al (1978) "Bibliotherapy is more than a technique. It is an expression of a conception of man that envisions the individual as a unique and purposive being who strives for better mental health and personal adjustment. Bibliotherapy is an expression of a therapeutic or rehabilitative stance that focuses upon both psychological maturity and general mental health. Bibliotherapy is an expression of a philosophy and an adjunctive type of helping relationship in which the practitioner attempts to help the student (or client) to maximize self-development through the media of didactic and imaginative literature." A recent definition of Bibliotherapy by Coombs (2000) gives a more education-oriented outlook on the concept stating, that "Bibliotherapy is a technique that uses literature to help students develop self-awareness and to better understand their problems." Vezzali et. al (2014) published a paper that shows that reading Harry Potter improved the attitude of high school and university students towards marginalized groups like immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees. The same study also supported the occurrence of perspective that allowed improvement in attitude. Mar et. al (2006) and Mar et. al (2009), and Kidd & Castano (2013) showed that people who read fiction were more empathetic which boosted their ability to register and read emotions better, having greater abilities of the theory of mind and comprehend complex social situations better.

### ***Bibliotherapy and Mental Health***

Literature can be used as a means to tutor children on the importance of mental health and the role that it plays in our overall well being and functioning. Bibliotherapy helps to

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promote mental health literacy among children starting from a young age itself to learn about emotions, feelings, and the consequent actions that we take because of it. According to Prater et al., (2006) students find help through the process of Bibliotherapy to safely analyze their behaviors and thoughts when they identify with the characters that also happen to deal with the similar kind of situations, as they try to channelize the circumstances of their life through characters in a fictional piece of work. According to a study by Schrank (1982), bibliotherapy has a positive impact on the mental health of young children. Research by Appleberry (1969) showed that third-grade children who read bibliotherapeutic books showed an improvement in their mental health. Further research by Borders and Paisley (1992) supported developmental growth in just 12 sessions of bibliotherapy for the fourth and fifth-grade students. Leitz (2018) in her project on bibliotherapy talks about how bibliotherapy can be practiced in a classroom setting. By integrating mental health literature in the English classroom, it helps to address mental health concerns and needs, providing a platform for discussion and enable meet their emotional needs in a comfortable and intimate setting. Mental health literacy and knowledge about what might be the problems that people face daily, and the snowball effect leading to something so much more as a consequence of it not being talked about and mostly denied in hushed whispers, why Mumbauer & Kelchner (2017-18) talk about the relevance of bibliotherapy in a school setting and using it to promote mental health literacy, and on how to seek help and from whom; all the while also providing us with a list of books that can be used for different age groups.

### ***Bibliotherapy and Social-Emotional Learning***

Books can be used to facilitate socio-emotional learning in children. Many books are written with a focus to make kids understand different emotions and how to deal with them. In a blog post by Bijal Shah (2021) she mentions a list of 5 books that can be used to inform kids and how they can adapt better to this ongoing pandemic, so that kids feel equipped with information and we as adults, can address their concerns. According to Berns (2004), by reading through a book, the student can distinguish and put distance from their own emotions and focus outside the sphere, which makes it easy for them to express what they are thinking about their ideas and feelings. Inman et al. (2000) also established the same, after a bibliotherapy session students can verbalize their thoughts and discuss them in a better way. Ahn (2008), in their study, found that bibliotherapy led to amplification in prosocial behavior and reduction in anger (Shechtman, 1999). Başarı et al. (2018) view that there are gender differences in socio-emotional learning and after Bibliotherapy sessions, male students are more prone to emotional control whereas female students are higher on emotional expression. Bibliotherapy has a positive impact on an individual's self-concept resulting in academic achievement (Queen, 1976), like self-esteem (Garagn, 1983), improvement in reading (Ray, 1983), positive social adjustment, self-concept (Peryon, 1982), and self-identification as well as acceptance of self (Lindsey & Frith, 1981). Fairytales when used in bibliotherapy session results in improved imagination which helps to deal with problems in a creative way and find a deeper meaning of life and struggles (Gornicki, 1981). When students work together in groups in a bibliotherapy session, they grow socially and emotionally and have their insights about themselves (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006), develop empathy (Berns, 2004), self-confidence (Johnson et al. 2001), and can be used as a tool for interpersonal growth for self-help treatment. (Pardeck, 1990)

### ***Bibliotherapy and Well Being, Growth***

The personal growth and well-being of a person can also be improved by using bibliotherapy as an intervention. And by growth, we do not imply on a personal internal level but external as well, including the ability to express better, communicate better and be an improved and

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healthier version of oneself that an individual can be. Schrank & Engels' (1982) research supported that this technique can be in general to foster self-development, enhance behavioral changes for the good, and ability modify attitudes. Berg-Cross & Berg-Cross (1978) tried to study attitude change in four-six-year-olds about sex-role stereotyping, friendship, and risk-taking behaviors and it was concluded that there were significant differences. Shepherd & Koberstein (1989) in their study supported a positive change in the behavior of the preschool kids as they became more prone to sharing. A study by Webster (1961) supported that bibliotherapy leads to fear reduction in children of first grade. Paprousi, Andreou & Gkouni (2011) talks about how developmental fears like fear of death can be tackled using bibliotherapy and help kids to be more empathetic and talk more openly about their fears. Children's psychological well being can be improved and looked after by using literature, the idea of which, is supported by the work of Lucas & Soares (2013), which enlighten us on how Bibliotherapy can be introduced in the schools, the process, and activities that can be conducted to promote well being, opportunities to grow in their safe environment and how it can be used to increase learning motivation in children (Mandas et al, 2019).

### ***Bibliotherapy and Inclusivity***

Inclusivity in a classroom environment is an important factor for the healthy growth and maturity of everyone. Inclusivity not just for outsiders but for oneself as well, to be open to all cultures, especially able, sexual orientations, and genders. Mihić (2017) in his work suggests Bibliotherapy as a fine tool that results in children building more inclusive classrooms and being more capable and better learners. In further research by Kingsley (2017), it was similarly found that kids become more inclusive to students with special needs and there is a decline in persistent negative attitude and which has led to an improvement in their outlook. Vare & Norton (2004) and Blackburn & Miller (2017) in their work talk about bringing inclusivity into the classroom by using narratives that normalize the LGBTQ+ community and educating children by designing such structural classrooms to educate them on sexual orientations and different types of families that exist. (Lichtsinn, 2013) Social workers while applying Bibliotherapy to diverse racial and ethnic groups give utmost importance to the books that they choose, the culture those books represent, and the characters in the story.

### ***Bibliotherapy and Bullying Prevention, Drug Abuse***

Bullying and teasing is a negative experience that various students go through, some choose to talk about it and some do not, Time to time, educational institutions try their best to avoid and prevent such acts and practices. So, it is important to see how bibliotherapy can be used as an intervention. Gregory & Vessey (2004), put out how bibliotherapy sessions help the kids to relate to fictional characters and be emotionally vulnerable to be able to talk about their experiences and when practiced in a group setting it helps them to be able to form their community and build coping strategies for the course of action that would take place if such bullying and teasing happens to take place. (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008; Jack & Ronan, 2008 and Oliver & Young, 1994) Bibliotherapy is seen as a potential tool that can be used to encourage kids to take an active stand against bullying and also build positive, compassionate, and inclusive learning spaces particularly involving the bystanders to take an active stance and support the victims. Bump (1990), talks of bibliotherapy as a novel way of drug abuse education, talking about various authors in the class who explain the consequences of alcohol and drugs in their poetry, fictional and non-fictional work, and how it can also be molded as a prevention program for both children and adolescents (Yusuf & Taharem, 2006).

### ***Bibliotherapy and its Application***

In this subsection, we will talk about various researches that help us to understand how bibliotherapy has been applied in the past, in some cases to specific populations and other research works which tell us how lesson plans were built and application of bibliotherapy was done in the classroom setting for readers who are in such a setting to have a better idea at how we can try and administer the same. Fisher (2009) gives an idea of how she applied bibliotherapy in her class for gifted students, by choosing books on their reading level, which had giftedness as the basic storyline. It helps the kids to understand themselves better, deal with sensitivities and social-emotional issues as well. Tukhareli (2011) in her work lays out the importance of Bibliotherapy in the library setting to reach out to students with HIV-AIDS, to cater to their needs, to analyze better, and address concerns; this can be applied to siblings of HIV-AIDS patients as well. Talking about the application of Bibliotherapy in the classroom, Furner (2017) supports how for STEM education children's literature is a helpful tool, specifically for mathematics; children who are math- anxious or even gifted, bibliotherapy helps. It is followed by a lesson plan that can be executed in the classroom. Parker (2005) gives us two elaborate lesson plan samples of how Bibliotherapy can be applied:

1. By using, *Holes* by Louis Sachar for sixth graders for development of characteristics like caring and helping others
2. Using, *The Tortoise and The Hare* for kindergarten kids to develop perseverance.

Similarly, Gregory & Vessey (2004), put out how bibliotherapy sessions help the kids to relate to fictional characters and be emotionally vulnerable to be able to talk about their experiences and when practiced in a group setting it helps them to be able to form their community and build coping strategies for the course of action that would take place if such bullying and teasing happens to take place. (Oliver & Young, 1994; Crothers & Kolbert, 2008 and Jack & Ronan, 2008)

## **DISCUSSION**

Children and adolescents in school learn to be complete human beings which helps them to face the challenges in life adequately and emotionally adapt to the environment and circumstances that come their way. A study by Delors et al (2005) suggests that in school children learn how to "know", "do", "live together" and "be a better person", which in turn would help to make a better decision in their life. Bibliotherapy is a tool or a projective technique to help not just adults but children to cope with the changes that follow whether emotionally or mentally (Branco, 2001 and Lucas, et.al 2006). Davis (1992) states how bibliotherapy as an interactive and dynamic process helps the children to be acquainted with the fact that life is about the challenges that come our way and will have an impact on how people will go on while developing a resilient personality in such circumstances. Suvilehto (2019) gives us an insight into how Bibliotherapy with the help of stories offers a single solution to various developmental problems that are faced by children, as children interact with fictional characters and end up finding some elements to relate and learn a skill set that may help to deal with similar problems. A well-chosen book might end up as a handbook of the solution to problems that are faced daily. Studies have been found to support that bibliotherapy is beneficial in dealing with problems like anxiety (Register, Beckham, May & Gustafsch, 1991), bullying (Oliver & Young, 1994), aggression (Shechtman, 1999), and abuse (Pardeck, 1990).

### CONCLUSION

Bibliotherapy is an emerging field, and with the number of literary sources that are being published every day, it is not only a very relatable therapeutic technique but very cost-effective as well. Forgan (2002) suggests that bibliotherapy is useful to develop a positive concept and honesty in self-image, growth in skills to solve problems, understand that you are not alone facing such problems, abilities to find alternative solutions, find a sense of relief, foster a better understand of human beings and have a growth of interests. In schools we are surrounded by textbooks and read in many different languages especially in a country like India; only if we were to focus on stories, poetry, play, and other auditory-visual pieces of literature from the point of view of healing and making connections and not cramming for the sake of getting marks, we could learn more in a very wholesome & holistic way. Works of Haynes (2019), Gladding & Gladding (1991), and Rubin (1978,1979) are of greater help to understand the processes of bibliotherapy application, its administration, specificities that counselors and teachers must keep in mind while choosing the books, the activities, and so many more specificities. Even if one child becomes able enough to deal with social-emotional challenges of life with the added academic benefit of reading more, bibliotherapy is nothing less of a reward.

The future of research experimentally is very bright since seeing examples of case studies and lesson plans that have been implemented in the western setting, opens new horizons for us to try the same. We have an added advantage to try it in more than one language; it can be done in regional languages too. There is a lack of Indian perspective in the existing research on bibliotherapy which gives a new field in which work can be done. Further research can be done on the use of Bibliotherapy concerning sex education, gender roles, and stereotypes. In schools using bibliotherapy with kids suffering from any kind of chronic disease, individually created plans to understand their physiology better and feel normalized and that capacity to handle life and future circumstances well.

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