An overview of bibliotherapy as an intervention for young children

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An overview of bibliotherapy as an intervention for young children

Abstract
Young children can benefit from therapy to deal with disabilities, abuse, normal developmental issues such as family problems, and social-emotional issues. One approach to helping children manage psychological issues is bibliotherapy. In its simplest form, bibliotherapy can be described as the practice of using books in treatment, or helping with books (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1987). The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on bibliotherapy and to examine its possible applications, its effectiveness, and best practices in carrying out the intervention.
AN OVERVIEW OF
BIBLIOThERAPY AS AN
INTERVENTION FOR
YOUNG CHILDREN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION.................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem............................................................... 1
  Significance of the Problem.......................................................... 2
  Definition of Terms....................................................................... 3
  Organization of Paper.................................................................. 3

Chapter 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........................................... 5
  Definitions and Goals of Bibliotherapy......................................... 5
  An Historical Overview............................................................... 7
  Applications................................................................................ 9
  Who Can Use Bibliotherapy........................................................ 26
  Effectiveness................................................................................ 27
  Conclusion................................................................................... 32

Chapter 3 SUMMARY/CONCLUSION.................................................. 33
  Implications for School Psychologists........................................... 33
  Procedure/Process...................................................................... 34
  Limitations.................................................................................. 40
  Future Research.......................................................................... 41
  Summary..................................................................................... 42
  References.................................................................................. 44
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Young children can benefit from therapy to deal with disabilities, abuse, normal developmental issues such as family problems, and social-emotional issues. One approach to helping children manage psychological issues is bibliotherapy. In its simplest form, bibliotherapy can be described as the practice of using books in treatment, or helping with books (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1987). The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on bibliotherapy and to examine its possible applications, its effectiveness, and best practices in carrying out the intervention.

Statement of the Problem

One population with whom various types of therapies have been used is that of young children. Some children experience stress, difficulties, and problems in their lives, and it is important that their concerns be handled appropriately in order to promote optimal growth and development. If psychological problems in the young are not handled promptly and effectively, the problems follow them throughout life and affect their lifelong mental health. Therefore, it is essential that professionals and non-professionals alike are aware of the various types of therapies available for young children. More specifically, helping
professionals need to be aware of the benefits and effectiveness of bibliotherapy with children. School psychologists, in particular, must be familiar with various stresses in children's lives, and must be well trained to help children with their problems. School psychologists would do well to be trained in bibliotherapy so that they can use it to help numerous children with various issues. Through reading and telling stories, school psychologists can help promote mental health and resolve emotional problems in children.

Through bibliotherapy, children share similar problems with one or more characters in the stories, and the children can perceive these similarities (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989; Jeon, 1992; Pardeck & Markward, 1995). Adderholdt-Elliot and Eller (1989) described that, through the similarities between the character and the child being treated, bibliotherapy allows for an interaction between the reader and the story. This interaction can be less threatening and easier to talk about than directly confronting a child’s problems.

Significance of the Problem

Bibliotherapy has many benefits, including providing insight and information about problems, constructing awareness that others have dealt with comparable problems, stimulating discussion about problems, offering solutions to problems, and communicating various values and
attitudes. Bibliotherapy allows children to learn alternative ways of approaching and thinking about problems. The technique provides children with a means to foster self-understanding and change in a supportive environment to cope with emotional stress (Doll & Doll, 1997; Cohen, 1987; Joshua & DiMenna, 2000; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck, 1995). The discussion of books with parents, teachers, other adults, and other children, can help children gain insight into their problem(s) (Kramer, 1999).

**Definition of Terms**

Bibliotherapy with children can be described as the sharing of books and other reading materials, usually through the telling of stories, to promote mental health and help solve emotional problems (Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995).

**Organization of Paper**

This paper will review the theoretical and research literature concerning bibliotherapy with young children. In addition to this chapter, there are two additional chapters. In chapter two, the history of bibliotherapy will be discussed, ways in which it is used will be described, and its effectiveness as a therapy will be evaluated. In
chapter three, effective implementation of bibliotherapy will be discussed, people who can utilize bibliotherapy to help young children will be suggested, and how the treatment relates to school psychology will be discussed. Finally, limitations of bibliotherapy and ideas for future research will be presented.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definitions and Goals of Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy has been known by various names throughout the years, including bibliopsychology, biblioeducation, bibliocounseling, biblioprophylaxis, literatherapy, tutorial group therapy, and library therapeutics (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck, 1995). A common definition of bibliotherapy is “the use of books or stories for therapeutic purposes” (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 185). It is also characterized as utilizing selected reading to treat patients (Gubert, 1993), and can be illustrated as the use of literature to help change a person’s attitudes and behavior (Ouzts, 1991; Sullivan, 1987). It can help children gain understanding of the environment and oneself, find solutions to problems, and learn from others (Schrank & Engels, 1981).

Bibliotherapy is a tool that can treat various childhood problems as well as prevent problems (Kramer, 1999). It can be used as a treatment method for addressing clinical problems, for children with emotional distresses and those with minor adjustment problems, as well as normal growth and adjustment needs (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1987; Pardeck, 1990). Bibliotherapy also involves using literature to allow children to express themselves, thereby aiding healthy development and adaptation (Cohen, 1987).
Doll and Doll (1997) offered a simple definition of bibliotherapy, stating that it is "sharing a book or books with the intent of helping the reader deal with a personal problem" (p. 1). These authors also made a distinction between two types of bibliotherapy with children: developmental bibliotherapy (therapy that provides children with insight into various problems), and clinical bibliotherapy (therapy that is used by a highly trained mental health professional to aid children with serious problems). Similarly, Jeon (1992) distinguished between three types of bibliotherapy with children: institutional, clinical, and developmental. The author describes that developmental bibliotherapy, as described earlier, can be used by parents, teachers, and school counselors to meet the individual needs of children, while institutional and clinical bibliotherapy should be used for children with emotional and behavioral problems by mental health professionals.

The goals of bibliotherapy shed more light on the definitions of the therapy. Chatton (1988) offered three related purposes of bibliotherapy: (1) to provide pleasure and fulfillment with the experience of reading, (2) to allow young children to feel connected to others through reading as a shared experience, and (3) to provide children with books and a person to read about and share their problems with.

Watson (1980) stated additional goals of bibliotherapy. These include: (1) to teach the client to think positively and constructively, (2)
to encourage children to talk about their problems, (3) to help the child to realize that there are numerous solutions to problems, (4) to help children analyze their attitudes and behavior, and (5) to help children compare their problems with those of others. The next section will review the history of bibliotherapy.

An Historical Overview

The use of books for therapeutic purposes dates back to ancient times, as an ancient Thebian library entrance contained the inscription, “The Healing Place of the Soul.” These ancient people believed that books added quality and value to life through their use in education, therapy, communication, and contemplation (Schrank & Engels, 1981). Similarly, the Alexandrian library in ancient Egypt bears the inscription, “the nourishment of the soul” (Jeon, 1992). Therefore, the practice of bibliotherapy, although unrefined at the time, can be traced back to ancient Greece (Kramer & Smith, 1988; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993).

In 1916, the term “bibliotherapy” was created by Samuel Crothers to describe the use of books in treatment. The name was derived from two Greek words: *bilion*, which means *book*, and *therapeia*, which means *healing* (Cohen, 1987; Jackson, 2001; Myracle, 1995; Pardeck & Markward, 1995).
Bibliotherapy began to be recognized as a valid and important treatment approach in the fields of psychology and psychiatry at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, with Doctors Karl and William Meninger as its first professional advocates and researchers on the therapy (Ouzts, 1991; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck & Markward, 1995). In the 1930's, librarians began to accumulate lists of books that could be therapeutic to people, recognizing that literature can be useful in helping people change their thoughts, feelings, and actions. At this same time, counselors began to partner with librarians by prescribing books to clients who were experiencing certain problems (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). Consequently, one of the first organizations to publicly promote the use of bibliotherapy was the American Library Association (ALA) in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The ALA created libraries for institutions treating patients for various physical, mental, and emotional problems, such as hospitals (Pardeck & Markward, 1995). Around this time, bibliotherapy was used to provide services to World War I veterans.

This treatment later spread to other settings, and was first used with children in 1946. Initially, bibliotherapy involved the use of children's literature to shape the morals, values, and behaviors of children and adolescents. By the early 1970's, doctors, educators, psychologists, and other professionals were using children's literature as
a realistic means to help with modern childhood problems (Myracle, 1995). The next section of this paper will review some ways that bibliotherapy can be applied to help young children.

**Applications**

Bibliotherapy can be utilized as an intervention approach for a wide range of childhood issues such as childhood depression, aggression, and difficulty accepting a new family member into the household. Pardeck and Markward (1995) provided a list of books that can be used in bibliotherapy practices with childhood problems such as alcohol and drug use, child abuse, values and attitudes, family breakdown, death and dying, peers, school, fears, family struggles, self-image and sex roles, sex education, and special developmental needs. The following section will review the literature pertaining to specific uses of bibliotherapy with young children. The specific uses include: education, learning differences, inclusive schools, emotional issues, fear, child abuse, family issues, death, and development.

**Education**

Bibliotherapy can be used to help children with education issues. Although many studies have suggested that bibliotherapy may not be effective in its attempt to increase academic achievement (i.e., Schrank & Engels, 1981), other experts on the subject (i.e., Bauer & Balius, Jr.,
1995) point to the ways that bibliotherapy can improve a student’s learning. Bauer and Balius, Jr. (1995) stated that activities that are usually a component of bibliotherapy, such as retelling a story and writing about it, can aid in the development of children’s critical listening, memory, comprehension, and language development skills. The authors pointed out how critical and effective listening skills are developed as the teacher or other professional tells the story and how oral expression and memory skills are developed as the students retell the story. Another follow-up activity that is often used in bibliotherapy is having the students write about the story and their personal experiences and/or responses to the story, either in journals or elsewhere. This frequent writing activity improves students’ cognitive and language skills.

It is logical to assume that bibliotherapy, taking into consideration its use of literature, may improve academic achievement and learning skills of students. However, there is little research on this topic, and the research that exists does not prove this assumption.

**Learning Differences**

The second specific way that bibliotherapy can be used is for children who learn differently from the norm. Numerous children possess learning and academic characteristics that are significantly different from the norm. One such population is that of gifted children, whose academic abilities appear to be significantly above that of the
average child. Jeon (1992) outlined three benefits of the implementation of a bibliotherapy program for gifted children. First, gifted children are at risk of suffering stress and anxiety as a result of pressure, tension, and competition in school. Bibliotherapy can be useful in lessening the intensity of this anxiety. Second, bibliotherapy may be an especially effective therapy for gifted students as a result of their preexisting interest in reading, their early mastery of reading-related skills, their advanced ability in reading, their enthusiasm for asking questions, and their frequent use of critical thinking (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Hebert, 1991; Jeon, 1992). Lastly, as a result of this interest in reading and critical thinking and memory skills, gifted students are prime candidates for preventive bibliotherapy. By exposing children to potential problems and stresses that may occur in the future, these children are more likely to remember the scenario that was encountered in previously read literature and will be better prepared to handle it in a healthy way.

According to Jeon (1992), bibliotherapy can be used with gifted children to: (1) change and develop attitudes, values, and higher-level thinking, (2) enhance children's self-concept, (3) support career education, (4) improve problem-solving skills, and (5) reduce withdrawn or aggressive behavior of the gifted underachiever. Jeon also points out that gifted children may be reluctant to share their feelings with parents,
teachers, or other adult figures. Bibliotherapy, however, may be a way to encourage and allow children to share their emotions, contributing to mental health.

Hebert (1991) conducted research on the special issues that gifted boys face because of their learning differences. These six concerns of gifted boys are cultural expectations, gender role conflict, the male bonding need, image management, the label of "different," and pressure inflicted on oneself. According to Hebert, bibliotherapy can be used as an effective intervention for the issues that these boys face. If used correctly, it can allow gifted students to develop positive attitudes toward themselves, their uniqueness, their relationships with others, and the world around them. Additional unique problems that gifted children face include possible boredom in school, being misunderstood by peers and teachers, and not being accepted by peers because of their differences. Further, gifted children often have problems making educational and vocational goals because they perform well on many different tasks. These problems lead gifted children to feel inadequate and develop a negative self-concept (Frasier & McCannon, 1981), the effects of which can be curbed by bibliotherapy practices.

An additional characteristic that many gifted students share is that of perfectionistic tendencies. These characteristics lead to stress and anxiety, feelings of worthlessness when perfectionism is not reached, and
other problems. Ultimately, perfectionism can lead children to be at risk for dropping out of school, committing suicide, developing eating disorders, abusing drugs and alcohol, and other self-defeating behaviors. Therefore, it is important to address and deal with gifted children's perfectionistic characteristics at an early age. Bibliotherapy can allow students to reflect on the characteristics that are shared by many gifted students, and to work through some of the problems faced by these students (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989).

Hebert (1991) stated that reading or hearing fiction about other gifted children allows the gifted student to reflect on his or her own problems, interests, and concerns in a safe context. Additionally, bibliotherapy can show gifted students that they are not alone in their differences and stresses, as well as provide role models of people who have shared similar experiences and effectively handled them (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989). Reading about other gifted children can also take the place of a missing peer group (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989).

On the other end of the spectrum exist children with learning disabilities, who face many problems that can also be addressed through bibliotherapy. Children with learning disabilities often have low self-esteem, and this needs to be boosted in order to motivate them to put effort into their learning (Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995). Lenkowsky,
Dayboch, Barowsky, Puccio, and Lenkowsky (1987) conducted research on the effects of bibliotherapy on the self-concepts of learning disabled students. Scores on a self-concept scale showed that students in the bibliotherapy treatment groups had higher self-concepts after the treatment than before, whereas there was no change in self-concept among the students in the control group. Although additional research needs to be compiled, these results indicate that bibliotherapy can be effective in improving the self-concept of students. This increase in self-concept may result in improved academic performance.

Inclusive Schools

Bibliotherapy can also be used to help children in inclusive schools and classrooms. Children with disabilities face numerous problems when being integrated into regular education classrooms. It is best for all students, both disabled and non-disabled, to understand and accept one another, and to get along with one another as friends despite the differences. Bibliotherapy can be an effective intervention strategy to foster this type of understanding and acceptance among children in inclusive classrooms.

Sullivan (1987) described how literature can be used to promote deeper social understanding among children. More specifically, Bauer (1985) states that children's books can be used, through the process of bibliotherapy, to promote healthy attitudes toward people with
disabilities. The intervention can be used to “promote attitudes of respect and acceptance in inclusive environments” (Kramer, 1999, p. 34).

Many criteria need to be taken into account when choosing literature for use with students in inclusive environments. First, the literature must focus on the similarities of the disabled and non-disabled students, rather than the differences, in order to avoid promoting stereotypes. Additionally, the reading material must portray the person(s) with disabilities in a realistic manner and in a variety of settings and situations. This will allow the children to gain a clearer understanding of what life is like for the disabled student. The books used in interventions should also model healthy interaction between disabled and non-disabled persons, as well as acceptance, understanding, and admiration of the disabled character (Myles, Ormsbee, Downing, Walker, & Hudson, 1992).

Sipsas-Herrmann, et al. (1996) implemented a bibliotherapy intervention with non-disabled students to foster acceptance of and positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. Using 247 elementary school students as subjects, the researchers implemented bibliotherapy using fiction books in one treatment group and non-fiction books in the other treatment group, while no books were used in the control group. The Acceptance Scale was used for the pretest-posttest design, and the authors claimed weak treatment effects, in spite of the
fact that the research resulted in no statistical significance. In this instance, bibliotherapy for increasing acceptance of children with disabilities was unsuccessful.

These results may lead to the conclusion that bibliotherapy is ineffective for increasing acceptance of children with disabilities. However, some characteristics of this research need to be taken into account. For instance, data from 82 students were excluded from the final results, leaving only 165 total cases. This high number of excluded cases should lead one to question whether the results of the study are accurate.

Research on the effects of bibliotherapy on children’s attitudes toward the disabled was also carried out by Beardsley (1982). Seven books showing interactions between disabled and non-disabled students were read to treatment groups of third-grade students, one book every other school day. Self-report attitude scales were given to both the treatment groups and the control groups before and after the intervention. Statistical analyses of the test reports showed that bibliotherapy had little effect on the children’s attitudes toward the disabled.

Although these two studies have shown that bibliotherapy has little to no effect for creating positive attitudes toward and acceptance of children with disabilities, other factors may have hindered the
effectiveness of the bibliotherapy interventions. First and most importantly, discussing the literature that was read to the students, which has been proven to be a vital component in the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, was not a part of the treatment. Additionally, self-report tests can be fairly unreliable with young children. For example, reliability coefficients for the Likert-type rating scale in the Beardsley study were barely adequate, at between .77 and .79. This could have caused the statistical analyses in the research to show that the interventions were ineffective.

**Emotional Issues**

Bibliotherapy is also useful with children with almost any childhood emotional problem, from those suffering from the effects of crisis situations to those labeled as severely emotionally disabled. Jalongo (1983) outlined the advantages of using literature for treatment of children who have crisis experience, as well as the use of bibliotherapy to prepare children for and inform students of the possibility of crises. First, literature can provide information about crises and can stimulate adult-child interaction regarding various situations. Literature can also provide children with the feeling that the crisis information is relevant to their lives, and can allow a child to accept and normalize their reactions to crisis situations.
Bibliotherapy can also be utilized to promote healthy adjustment and development with emotionally and behaviorally disabled (EBD) children. Books can help these children to learn alternatives to their behavior, and can encourage behavioral change because of the nonconfrontational nature of literature. EBD children often become isolated from those around them as a result of their inappropriate and unproductive behaviors, and bibliotherapy provides opportunities to work with others and promote emotional and social development, as well as classroom achievement. Bibliotherapy also makes available a context for emotional development and adjustment, especially when group discussions occur (Dunn-Snow, 1997; King & Schwabenlender, 1994).

Shechtman (1999) conducted a study with young aggressive boys, attempting to reduce aggressive feelings and behavior with a group bibliotherapy intervention. Through teacher and self reports before and after the intervention, it was determined that all five of the treatment subjects displayed reduced aggression, while there was no change in aggression reports among the students in the control group. While the research methodology followed statistical guidelines (e.g., teacher and student self-reports were validated through objective observation), readers should be cautious because the study was not intended for empirical research, and instead followed clinical guidelines. Therefore, few experimental controls were taken while this study was carried out.
More recently, Shechtman (2000) studied the effects of bibliotherapy to reduce aggression with 70 special education students with behavioral problems. Results of the research indicate that the bibliotherapy intervention was effective in reducing aggression and promoting appropriate behavior. Student and teacher reports of aggression were administered before and after the intervention. The utilization of reports from two sources increases the likelihood that the results are correct. However, tests for possible long-term effects of the intervention were not given to the students, so it is unknown if these results were long lasting.

Fear

An additional specific use of bibliotherapy is that as an intervention for the simpler, but common early childhood problem of fear. Bibliotherapy can be used to help children develop coping skills so that their fears do not become maladaptive (Cohen & Fish, 1993; Klingman, 1988).

Klingman (1988) studied the results of a bibliotherapy intervention to reduce fear of the dark in kindergarten students. Forty-two children were randomly assigned to a control or experimental group. The intervention consisted of five 20-minute sessions during which an adult read a book that dealt positively with the dark to the children, and discussion followed. After the bibliotherapy intervention, the
experimental group reported less fear of the dark, and increased the use of coping statements during discussion. Although the findings are preliminary, this research provides evidence for the potential usefulness and effectiveness of the utilization of bibliotherapy to prevent and control fears in young children.

Similarly, Newhouse (1987) conducted bibliotherapy sessions to reduce general, common childhood fears with a randomly selected group of 15 second-grade children. These one-hour sessions included the oral reading of selected books on fear-related topics such as death and darkness, followed by supervised discussions concerning the children's identification with, attitudes toward, and feelings regarding the stories. Pretest and posttest scores on a children's fear scale indicated that fear was reduced as a result of the intervention. However, this treatment included 56 bibliotherapy sessions because a similar experiment in the past, which included 28 sessions, had not yielded positive effects on children's fear. This implies that bibliotherapy used in the treatment of fear cannot be thought of as a "quick fix."

Child Abuse

Bibliotherapy can also be used to help children deal with child abuse. Child abuse is a serious problem and its effects certainly cannot be cured through a bibliotherapy intervention alone. However, bibliotherapy can be used as a supportive therapy, as well as a
prevention tool for child abuse. Abused children often have a difficult time with conventional methods of therapy, as the direct talking makes the child feel threatened, and it is difficult for the child to gain a trusting relationship with a therapist. Bibliotherapy may be useful in these situations, as it is an indirect way of dealing with problems, and it allows children to think about their problems and abuse as it is happening to the characters in the literature (Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Watson, 1980).

Pardeck (1990) provided a list of ways in which bibliotherapy can be a useful intervention for abused children. The books can help abused children find solutions to problems, can aid in the use of positive thinking techniques, and can allow the child to express fears related to the abuse. Bibliotherapy can also help the child be able to analyze behaviors and problems of him or herself and others around them, resulting in the creation of new and positive ways to deal with them. In addition, the reading and hearing of books can allow the abused child to become emotionally and psychologically involved with the characters, which can be useful for helping the child develop real-world relationships. The child can also see, through books, that other people have experienced similar situations and problems, allowing them to relate to others.
Books used in bibliotherapy with abused children should contain believable characters and situations with which the abused child can identify (Pardeck, 1990). When carrying out bibliotherapy with abused children, the therapist must be patient, as these children often suppress their curiosity and prefer not to take action because they are afraid of being punished, as they were in the abusive situation (Pardeck, 1990). To allow for the child’s delicate emotional state, the counselor should ask the child to analyze the characters’ feelings and reasons for acting before they delve into how the book may relate to their own life (Watson, 1980).

Bibliotherapy can also be used as a preventive tool for child abuse, as books can be used to teach children about appropriate and inappropriate behavior and touching by adults (Pardeck, 1990). Follow-up activities, such as using puppets and role-playing situations, can be used in conjunction with bibliotherapy to prevent child abuse more effectively (Hollander, 1989).

Family Issues

Another specific way that bibliotherapy can be used is as an intervention to help children with family issues. Families can be a child’s most important source of support and happiness, can be the cause of childhood stresses and problems, or can be both of these things. Either way, children need help coping with all of the issues they face within their families. Pardeck and Pardeck (1987) stated that the three family
trends that most impact children are the growing number of single-parent families, divorces, and children living in blended family systems.

Bibliotherapy helps children get in touch with the emotions that they experience because of a divorce, since many young children find it difficult to express their emotions (Kramer & Smith, 1998). In addition, bibliotherapy allows children of divorce to deal with the matter in an indirect manner first, so they are not pressured into talking about their own problems (Yauman, 1991). This therapy also can be useful to those children who are not experiencing a parental divorce, as it provides these children with insight, understanding, and kindness toward those children of divorce in their peer group (Carlile, 1991; Kramer & Smith, 1998).

Books used in bibliotherapy for children of divorce should be realistic (i.e., not a book in which the parents reunite in the end), should explore feelings and emotions that the characters experience as a result of their parent's divorce (i.e., bewilderment, unhappiness), and should focus on coping with life after the divorce (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993).

One positive aspect relating to bibliotherapy for stepfamilies is that it opens up the child to be able to communicate more and more clearly with their family. Follow-up activities to bibliotherapy, such as role playing, can also be done with the child and possibly the family to foster
communication and understanding regarding family roles, family rules, etc. (Coleman & Ganong, 1990).

**Death**

Death is another issue that some children might experience, and for which bibliotherapy can be of help. Books can facilitate children's understanding and acceptance of the life and death process. Klingman (1985) suggested that bibliotherapy can be used not only to increase understanding of death, but also to educate children on how to respond to a classmate who has experienced death.

Todahl, Smith, Barnes, and Pereira (1998) studied the impact of bibliotherapy, followed by parent-child discussion, on children's understanding of death. Twenty-nine children, aged four and five, were randomly assigned to a control group or an experimental group. Children in the experimental group received fourteen bibliotherapy sessions over a five-week period. Each child's parents, who followed detailed curriculum instructions on book reading and the discussion of death, provided the therapy. The Life and Death Interview measured the children's understanding of death. The results did not indicate that the experimental group had higher scores on the interview than the control group. Although these results do not support the use of bibliotherapy to facilitate children's understanding of death, research suggests that this knowledge varies widely among children, and that the understanding of
death develops progressively. The authors point out that more research needs to be carried out to study the effects of long-term bibliotherapy interventions on children's perceptions of death.

Although this research does not prove that the use of bibliotherapy is effective, there are few risks with this type of intervention. This leads one to assume that a bibliotherapy intervention, followed by discussion, to increase children's understanding and acceptance of death can and should be utilized, particularly by parents and counselors.

**Development**

Bibliotherapy can also be used as an effective tool to promote a child's social, emotional, and intellectual development (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1990). It can be used to meet any child's growth and adjustment needs throughout development (Pardeck, 1990).

One aspect of a young child's development is the social maturity a child must gain. Shepherd and Koberstein (1989) studied the use of bibliotherapy among preschool children to increase sharing behavior. They point out that books can help with sharing behavior because they take the abstract concept and allow the students to see it in a more concrete setting. The sharing behavior of six preschool children was observed for one week to obtain a frequency account of the target behavior. Then, books on the topic of sharing were read to the children daily, followed by teacher presentations with puppets to model the book
characters. The children were then allowed to role model the sharing behavior of the book characters with the puppets. Puppets and role modeling are common follow-up activities to increase the effectiveness of bibliotherapy. After this intervention, observations of the student's sharing behavior were taken, which indicated that sharing behavior did increase as a result of the bibliotherapy intervention.

This section dealt with specific areas for which bibliotherapy can be used. The next section of this chapter addresses the topic of who can use bibliotherapy as an effective intervention for helping young children.

Who Can Use Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy has been used by various helping professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, educators, medical doctors, and social workers (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Schrank & Engels, 1981). Pardeck (1991) pointed out that "both professionals and nonprofessionals can effectively use bibliotherapy with children" (p. 58). School counselors can also carry out bibliotherapy interventions (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

Bibliotherapy for children with clinical problems can be carried out by trained counselors or therapists, while developmental bibliotherapy can occur in a classroom setting with a teacher (Kramer & Smith, 1998). It can be used by teachers to support the social, emotional, and
intellectual development of children (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1990). Many teachers feel the need to raise issues of present-day social concern to educate children and to facilitate thoughtful discussion on the topics. Books can serve as a “catalyst for discussion in the hope of sensitizing pupils to current social concerns” (Sullivan, 1987, p. 875). Bibliotherapy as an intervention is especially constructive in schools because teachers feel more comfortable with bibliotherapy than any other therapy technique, and the school environment is supportive of literature and the discussion of it. When carrying out bibliotherapy, teachers need to be sensitive to children and their needs, and they need a support system in case a child displays the need for professional counseling (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989; Hendrickson, 1988).

In addition, librarians, nurses, and parents can all effectively use the techniques of bibliotherapy to help children with nonclinical problems and developmental issues (Chatton, 1988; Cohen, 1987; Kramer, 1999). This section discussed who can use bibliotherapy, while the next section will review the effectiveness of bibliotherapy.

**Effectiveness**

**Expert Opinion**

Most of the arguments for the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as an intervention for young children are based on expert and practitioner
Pardeck and Pardeck (1990) asserted that "the creative use of bibliotherapy can enhance the reading skills of students, as well as their total social and emotional development" (p. 229). Additionally, they state that bibliotherapy teaches children positive thinking skills, free expression, collaborative group skills, the ability to analyze their own attitudes and behavior, and effective strategies for dealing with problems. The reading of books can benefit children because the story allows children to vicariously experience what is going on, sense images, feelings, solutions, and judgments, and try out various approaches to problems through the imagination as the story is read (Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995; Hebert, 1991; Watson, 1980).

Schrank and Engels (1981) pointed out that bibliotherapy can be effective in encouraging assertiveness, attitude change, and self development among children. Bibliotherapy can also provide coping strategies, relieve stress, increase a child's self-understanding, and foster understanding and empathy for others (Kramer & Smith, 1998). Along with this, it can help children to understand their own characteristics and characteristics of human thought and behavior by exposing them to various characters and ways of living. It also provides a way for children to release emotions, and can show children appropriate ways of relating to oneself and others (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). King and
Schwabenlender (1994) asserted that “bibliotherapy can empower children to think, feel, and act in more successful and productive ways” (p.15).

Since children often have difficulty defining and expressing their feelings, bibliotherapy can be especially effective because it provides children with a vocabulary to express feelings, encourages expression of feelings, validates children’s feelings, and allows children to solve problems in the third person (Adderholdt-Elliot & Eller, 1989; Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995; Pardeck, 1990). Many children in therapy also prefer to communicate about their environment and their problems through metaphors and displacement. Bibliotherapy allows for this type of experience (Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995). It is a nonconfrontational approach to promote change and increase a child’s awareness of problems (King & Schwabenlender, 1994). It can help children to recognize that they are not alone in experiencing a problem, allow children to share their experience with others, gain insight into their problem, and apply attention outside of the self (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1987). In addition, the use of books can permit children to see how others handled similar problems and faced similar emotions, can help children gain insight into solutions to problems, can allow children to identify with a character in a book, and can help children to not feel alone and different (McCarty & Chalmers, 1997; Myracle, 1995; Pardeck,
1990). Through experiencing the problems of characters, bibliotherapy allows children to gain awareness of their own feelings and reactions, and to evaluate what their own behavior may be in similar types of situations (Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995).

Bibliotherapy can also be used in prevention. Children can read about how others overcame problems and apply this information to their own life, aiding in the prevention of difficult situations becoming serious problems (McCarty & Chalmers, 1997; Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck, 1991).

Pardeck (1990) pointed out that there are different ways of carrying out a bibliotherapy intervention with children that make it more or less effective. He states that even if the helping person uses bibliotherapy in an elementary way, the reading of literature still allows for some self-development and the exploration of feelings and attitudes, which can be helpful to children. Bibliotherapy is also advantageous over other methods of therapy because it is relatively inexpensive, nonintrusive, and simple (Sipsas-Herrmann, et al., 1996).

Other characteristics of bibliotherapy point to the possibility that it can be unproductive and ineffective in treating young children. It is possible that the child may reject the literature and/or the characters, and stories can create anxiety, resulting in a lack of problem solving and failure to identify with the characters (Gladding & Gladding, 1991; King & Schwabenlender, 1994; Watson, 1980). The unwillingness of children
to read the literature or pay attention to the story and to discuss it with the therapist can also result in bibliotherapy failure (Gladding & Gladding, 1991; King & Schwabenlender, 1994). Other aspects that may make bibliotherapy ineffective include participant fatigue, defensiveness, daydreaming, and inappropriate actions (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

In order for bibliotherapy to be effective, the facilitator must have an adequate and full understanding of human development and behavior, as well as in-depth knowledge regarding appropriate literature for bibliotherapy (Gladding & Gladding, 1991; King & Schwabenlender, 1994). Riordan, Mullis, and Nuchow (1996) point out that bibliotherapy is often ineffective when it is used as a sole intervention. While this section discussed expert opinion regarding the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, the next section will review research literature on the effectiveness of the intervention with young children.

Research

In a meta-analysis of studies on bibliotherapy, Marrs (1995) concluded that bibliotherapy is a moderately effective intervention for various problems. The study also indicates that there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of bibliotherapy and other types of treatments.

Similarly, in an analysis of studies on bibliotherapy, Schrank and Engels (1981) concluded that bibliotherapy is not effective in increasing
academic achievement and influencing self-concept, and that mixed results exist regarding bibliotherapy’s effectiveness to instigate behavioral change, fear education, and helper effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

Bibliotherapy as an intervention has an extensive, although unrefined, history. It can be applied to almost any childhood concern or topic, including education, learning differences, inclusive schools, emotional and behavioral issues, self-concept, fear, child abuse, family issues, death, and developmental issues. Professionals and nonprofessionals alike, from clinical psychologists to parents, can employ this intervention. Research regarding its effectiveness is mixed, yet many of bibliotherapy’s characteristics point to its usefulness for children. However, bibliotherapy will not work in all situations with all children, and one must be cautious of who facilitates the intervention. The next chapter will examine implications for school psychologists, best practices in using bibliotherapy, limitations of the intervention, and ideas for future research.
Chapter III

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Implications for School Psychologists

The main goal of school psychologists is to promote optimal growth and development of children. Bibliotherapy is one tool among many that school psychologists can utilize to help promote the mental health of children in schools.

One way in which school psychologists can take advantage of the widespread uses of bibliotherapy is to implement bibliotherapy programs into schools. Doll and Doll (1997) described nine steps that professionals can use to put a bibliotherapy program into practice. These programs can include group or individual bibliotherapy, and the treatment can be carried out by teachers, school paraprofessionals, school counselors, school psychologists, or parent volunteers, depending on the population the treatment will address.

School psychologists are commonly involved in the delivery and coordination of interventions for children with various types of problems, and school personnel look to them for guidance regarding interventions and children with problems. They also have the knowledge of the therapeutic process and the skills to effectively carry out bibliotherapy interventions. It is fairly easy to implement in schools because it is structured, and many children are willing to accept bibliotherapy
because it involves reading books, and so is not considered a therapy (Shechtman, 2000).

Pardeck (1990) provided a case example of a way in which school psychologists can implement bibliotherapy into schools. In this case, bibliotherapy was provided in a group setting to abused children to provide support, raise self-esteem, and improve socialization skills. As this section reviewed the use of bibliotherapy by school psychologists, the next section will discuss how to use the intervention.

Procedure/Process

For bibliotherapy to be effective, various guidelines should be followed by the facilitator regarding how to choose literature to use during the intervention, methods to aid in complete child understanding and insight into the process, and follow-up activities to facilitate positive results.

Choosing the Literature

There are various criteria that facilitators must take into consideration when choosing books for use with children. First, the book should match the client's reading ability and should be age-appropriate. A child will lose interest in books that are either too simple or too complicated. Second, the facilitator of bibliotherapy should consider the number of issues presented in the book. The more issues presented in a
book, the higher the quality. Fourth, an effective book for use in bibliotherapy is one that portrays realistic issues, people, and emotions, and has interesting story content with logical plot developments. Books used in bibliotherapy should also include some humor, and should not offend religious beliefs or values of the client. Books used should also display effective problem solving and coping strategies, and should be sensitive to the child's emotional and developmental needs by communicating through its characters that the reader is not alone in his or her problems, and should communicate that their feelings are acceptable and normal. Additionally, many authors suggest that the story closely parallel that child's situation (Coleman & Ganong, Jackson, 2001; McNamee & DeChiara, 1996; Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck, 1995)

Pardeck (1990) also asserted that therapists should take into consideration a child's chronological and emotional ages when choosing books, as children will be most interested in characters close to their own age. He states that while older children need books with story detail and character development, books with many appealing and colorful illustrations that enhance text (Cohen, 1987) and a simple format should be used for preschool children. Literature for preschool children should also include some kind of a surprise element to sustain interest, as well as repeated refrains of words that encourage a sense of familiarity.
Pardeck suggests that books with animal characters are especially useful for preschool children because it eliminates the issues of race, sex, and age of the characters, and allows children to focus on the story content (Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck, 1991; Pardeck & Markward, 1995). Books for young children should be brief and should match the attention spans of the children so that they do not lose interest (Cohen, 1987).

When working with minority children, Schliebner (1992) suggested that it is essential to choose literature that reflects the child’s cultural experience. This facilitates the child’s identification with the book characters. On this premise, the author also suggests that it is important to choose literature that closely resembles the child’s environment, family structure, language, and ethnicity.

**Method**

The first step of the facilitator of a bibliotherapy intervention is to assess the needs of the child (Cohen, 1987). Next, one should build a relationship with the client and become familiar with the child’s issues (Rosenthal, 1998). A trusting bond between the two is necessary for bibliotherapy to be effective (Pardeck, 1990). Reading aloud to children “provides an opportunity for a trusting relationship to develop” (p. 77) between the child and the bibliotherapy facilitator (Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck & Markward, 1995). The therapist should know the book well before using it in practice, and should pay attention to the illustrations,
any unusual words or phrases, and personality traits of characters (Pardeck, 1990).

The process of bibliotherapy consists of three stages: identification, catharsis, and insight. In the first stage, identification, the therapist’s task is to help the child see similarities between his or her problem and the book character’s problem. The child should see the setting, situation, and characters as being real. Catharsis, the second stage, involves the child sharing feelings with the character and living through the situations depicted in the book. During the third and final stage, insight, the child is helped to see that solutions and alternatives to the issue are possible. (Adderholdt-Elliot & Ellers, 1989; Bauer & Balius, Jr., 1995; Newhouse, 1987; Ouzts, 1991; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Pardeck, 1995)

One helpful technique when using bibliotherapy with a group of children, instead of reading the book to them or having them read it on their own, is to tape record the story, and play it back to the children. This allows the therapist to watch the children’s nonverbal reactions, and to stop the tape at various points in the story for discussion (Pardeck, 1990; Rosenthal, 1998). Another thing to keep in mind is that a book should never be forced on a child. Instead, they should be able to choose from several therapeutic books. If a child shows signs of distress or boredom during the reading of a book, it should be stopped immediately;
the child may not be ready for bibliotherapy, or the choice of books may need to be revised (Cohen, 1987).

An advantage of group bibliotherapy is that the children can “piggy back” off one another's ideas and come up with numerous ideas and alternatives (Rosenthal, 1998).

Discussion is an important part of bibliotherapy. After reading the literature, the story and its implications should be discussed between the child and the facilitator. The adult should also help the child consider their reactions to the book (Hendrickson, 1988; Pardeck, 1990). Most of the time, it is easier for children to talk about the feelings of the character rather than their own feelings (Cohen, 1987).

McCarty and Chalmers (1997) provided a list of steps that a therapist should follow during the discussion portion of bibliotherapy. First, the children should retell the plot and discuss the situations, characters, and feelings that are depicted in the book. Next, the children are asked questions that help them to identify with the characters and think about their own feelings. Third, the children should explore consequences of the feelings and behaviors depicted in the book by transferring the book's situation to real life. Last, the child or the group should draw generalizations and conclusions based on the book.
Follow-Up Activities

To increase the effectiveness of bibliotherapy with children, virtually all studies indicate that follow-up activities should be integrated into the intervention. If children are unwilling to talk about their feelings, they can be given the chance to express themselves through other activities such as art (e.g., drawing, painting, collages, family trees, clay figures), dramatization (through puppets, role-playing, or pantomiming), and writing (McCarty & Chalmers, 1997; Pardeck & Markward, 1995; Pardeck, 1991; Pardeck, 1995). Play can be used as a follow-up to bibliotherapy, especially for very young children, to allow the child to work through emotions introduced by the book (Cohen, 1987).

When bibliotherapy is used in a school setting, a variety of thinking and reading activities can be applied to the bibliotherapy session. Activities that can be used include: (1) answering questions over details of the story, (2) making predictions about what will happen in the book, (3) role-playing situations from the book, (4) creating a time line of events from the story, (5) thinking up an alternative ending for the book, and (6) writing a letter to or from a character in the book (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1990).
Limitations

Although bibliotherapy is an emerging discipline and is widely practiced, additional scientific support is needed (Lenkowsky, 1987; Pardeck, 1990; Pardeck & Markward, 1995; Riordan & Wilson, 1989; Schrank & Engels, 1981; Smith, 1989). Schrank & Engels (1981) stated that “positive recommendations of the value of bibliotherapy exceed available documentation of its usefulness” (p.146). Doll and Doll (1997) reported that results of bibliotherapy studies frequently conflict with one another. Therefore, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the treatment cannot be supported. In addition to this, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of bibliotherapy because it is difficult to separate the effects of the bibliotherapy treatment from the effects of the therapeutic relationship (Pardeck, 1990). In addition, many studies have shown positive results for children, but the results are not long lasting. Newhouse (1987) concluded from his research that attempted “quick fixes” (p.50) with bibliotherapy are ineffective. Various studies suggest that bibliotherapy is only successful with young children when it is used in conjunction with other treatments.

Bibliotherapy is often used as an adjunct to more common therapy techniques, and some authors point out that a limitation of bibliotherapy is that it should never be used as a stand-alone treatment (Joshua &
Another limitation of bibliotherapy is that it may not be as effective with children who are not good readers or do not enjoy reading. However, the bibliotherapy facilitator can use a tape-recorded book or read the book to these children (Joshua & DiMenna, 2000; Pardeck, 1995; Pardeck & Markward, 1995).

Kramer and Smith (1998) offered three additional limiting factors of bibliotherapy. First, the individual personalities of the participants could prohibit the effectiveness of the treatment. Similarly, if the facilitators lack skill, bibliotherapy effectiveness could be compromised. Finally, bibliotherapy may be ineffective if the child is unwilling to be involved in the process. These limiting factors of bibliotherapy are shared with all other forms of therapy, so they should not be interpreted as reasons for lack of effectiveness of the treatment.

**Future Research**

Additional empirical research is needed to further assess the effectiveness and usefulness of bibliotherapy. For example, behavioral observations of how students react to situations before and after bibliotherapy interventions are needed to test whether the treatment carries over into real life settings (Klingman, 1988). Studies of long-term
bibliotherapy treatments and long-term effects of bibliotherapy are also necessary to accurately test the efficacy of the intervention (Schrank & Engels, 1981; Todahl, Smith, Barnes, & Pereira, 1998).

To advance the research on bibliotherapy, more accurate and useful testing instruments also need to be developed (Schrank & Engels, 1981). Additionally, future studies should focus on and compare the effects of bibliotherapy in small groups, in pairs, and individually, results of which would have financial implications for school systems (Shechtman, 2000). Riordan (1991) concluded that research is needed to assess if bibliotherapy is an effective therapy by itself, and to ascertain what, when, and how it should be used as an element of a larger treatment intervention.

Summary

Bibliotherapy is a versatile, cost-effective, and easy-to-use intervention for young children. Psychologists, teachers, parents, and other helping professionals can implement it with all types of children to serve all types of purposes. Although there is little empirical evidence to support its effectiveness, bibliotherapy can be useful as an adjunct to traditional therapies. It can also be utilized to promote healthy growth and development among children. As an emerging intervention,
bibliotherapy is a vital addition to a school psychologist's repertoire of knowledge and skills.
References


