Bibliotherapy in the Classroom

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**Abstract:** Elementary school teachers are pressured to help students learn the basic information they will need for the rest of their lives, with primary emphasis on reading, writing, and math. That’s a tall order for both teachers and students. Students are expected to learn all the necessary academic material plus deal with life events such as death, bullying or peer pressure. Some students have the added anxiety of living with a disability. This is a lot of stress for students to cope with at such young ages. To help children manage stress and crises in their lives, a process called bibliotherapy is becoming more widely used in elementary classrooms. This literature review will examine and discuss: the types of students who need bibliotherapy and the facilitators who may implement it; strategies, materials and activities used in this method; how to execute bibliotherapy in the classroom; reasons to use bibliotherapy; and finally, overall benefits and assessments of the bibliotherapy process. In short, this review will show how and why teachers should use bibliotherapy in their elementary classroom.

Bibliotherapy in the Classroom

Throughout all stages of life, people experience crises or change that interrupts their daily routine and causes emotional turmoil. People use all kinds of methods to cope with life’s challenges; for example, social isolation. With social isolation, individuals feel that if they stay away from others and deal with problems on their own, the problem will get better and the issues will become easier to handle. Events such as divorce, death, peer drama, et cetera, can lead to an emotional crisis in a person’s life. One unique coping option and learning experience has been discovered by professionals seeking a way to help individuals, especially children, deal with crisis and change. The new option is called, bibliotherapy.

I chose bibliotherapy in the elementary classroom as a topic after taking the College of Saint Mary’s Children’s Literature course and learning about its purpose and role in student success. In many cases, students are highly motivated by books they can relate to and find similarities between themselves and story characters, which helps make their lives seem more acceptable. I was motivated by the thought that I could use literature of all types with my future students to help them understand that other people experience some of the same situations they do and find solutions or peace of mind from the books I provide them. Research for this literature review focused on 26 peer reviewed articles from a variety of education, psychology, and librarian magazines and journals. Sources were arranged based on their main ideas; for example counseling or bullying. They were then narrowed into smaller categories based on their content. I looked for information pertaining to: who uses or needs bibliotherapy; what strategies, materials, or activities are used; how to identify a need for bibliotherapy and use the process; why to use bibliotherapy; and the assessment of the bibliotherapy model. The process I used to arrange and categorize the research articles for my literary review led to the development of my guiding question.

Why or how is bibliotherapy useful in the elementary classroom? Before this question can be answered, it is important to define bibliotherapy and the history behind this literary method. Although no two people have the same definition of bibliotherapy, the descriptions are based on similar information.

“Bibliotherapy is simply defined as the use of books to help people solve problems” (Forgan, 2002, p. 75). Karen W. Gavigan and Stephanie Kurtts elaborated on Forgan’s definition by defining bibliotherapy as “a method of using literature to help students understand themselves and cope with problems relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs” (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2011, p. 11). The importance of Gavigan and Kurtts’ definition is that it emphasizes some of the topics to focus on when using bibliotherapy and that the method can be used for situations and needs of a personal nature.

Sarah Borders and Pamela Paisley defined bibliotherapy as “a process or activity designed to help individuals solve problems or better understand themselves through their response to literature or media” (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). People use bibliotherapy as a way to connect books with experiences in their own lives and use events in the stories to learn approaches for handling problems. In her article, *A Feeling for Books*, Jennifer Burek-Pierce, a professor of library at the University of Iowa, described bibliotherapy as a method of healing (Burek-Pierce, 2010). Books, both fiction and nonfiction, picture or chapter, can be used for bibliotherapy. Selecting the right book depends upon how a person may react to the book so that it does its job: help the individual identify himself or herself within the book (Burek-Pierce, 2010).

In the classroom, fictional children’s books are the most widely used type of literature because students are better able to identify with characters in these stories. It is important to select the proper book for each individual student so he or she can benefit from reading about story characters that are experiencing the same conditions or events the student is living through. For example, a child struggling with his or her parents’ divorce will relate best to books about characters whose parents are divorced. Overall, this type of literature is used to educate individuals about the personal issues they are facing (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006, p. 209). Literature in bibliotherapy needs to be focused on using the literature in therapeutic ways to aid children in working through a crisis (Kramer, 1999).

A crisis can be a major event in a student’s life such as death or a smaller problem such as a conflict with peers. No matter how big or small the crisis, bibliotherapy can be useful to the person. “Bibliotherapy can be used to provide information or insight about problems, stimulate discussion about problems, create awareness that other people have similar problems, and in some cases provide solutions to problems” (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 6). The uses of bibliotherapy are not assigned to one specific topic or one method, it is a universal concept that can apply to a large variety of topics and can be accompanied by a massive quantity of activities to support the literature (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006).

Two types of bibliotherapy are used by professionals: clinical and developmental. Clinical bibliotherapy is most often used by mental health professionals and the approach used is directed reading. Books in clinical bibliotherapy are used to stimulate discussion of difficult feelings or memories. Developmental bibliotherapy, on the other hand, is most often used in the classroom by teachers, librarians, counselors, and other school professionals. The common goal of developmental bibliotherapy is “to facilitate normal development and to educate students about attitudes, feelings, and behaviors such as bullying, divorce, and self-image” (Catalano, 2008, p. 17). There are three stages in Developmental Bibliotherapy: 1) identification; 2) catharsis; and 3) insight. Each stage will be discussed in depth later in this review when the guidelines of bibliotherapy are examined.

The concept of bibliotherapy is not new. For centuries, psychologists have been using books as a coping method for individuals. “The origins of bibliotherapy can be traced as far back as ancient Greece where literature was used to treat the mentally ill” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 91). During ancient times, a library was known to be the healing place for the soul. People in those times used the terms “biblion,” meaning book, and “therapeia,” meaning healing (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23). There may not have been books created specifically to help individuals heal from specific conditions, but books were the tools society used to help people who were mentally or physically ill. Years later, in the 17th century, books with spiritual titles were used by American colonists as a way to guide people in decision-making. In the 18th century, self-help literature became a new trend and in these pieces, there were promises of health and wealth. By the start of the 19th century, doctors were working with librarians to prescribe books to patients along with medicine. The idea behind prescribing books was that patients would become more aware of their condition (Catalano, 2008, p. 17).

It wasn’t until 1916 that the term, “bibliotherapy” was finally coined by Samuel McChord Crothers, an American author. Crothers used the word loosely with a lack of definition. It was a term he used to define lists of books used for therapeutic purposes (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23). The article by Crothers was discovered in an edition of Atlantic Monthly (Morawski, 2000, p. 48). In the 1930s and 1940s, the term became widely used to describe lists of books. “Librarians began compiling lists of books for therapeutic purposes. In this tradition, any written material that helped individuals modify their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors was considered potentially therapeutic” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991, p. 7). The literature of the 1950s and 1960s increased the use of this method. “In the last two decades, bibliotherapy has expanded to include self-actualization, self-help and education, and problem-solving applications, often termed limited-contact therapy approaches” (Lenkowsky, 1987). As society moves further into the 21st century, the use of bibliotherapy is becoming more common. The aims and objectives of bibliotherapy match with the 21st century ideals for education (Brewster, 2008, p. 172).

With an understanding of how bibliotherapy came to be, a discussion can begin about the who, what, how and why of bibliotherapy and an assessment of its use in the classroom. First, a few terms must be defined: gifted and talented students; elementary education; Learning Disabilities; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); and bullying. Gifted and talented students are defined as students with high intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, or specific academic ability, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop their capabilities. Elementary education is classified as academic instruction for students in grades one through four or six, usually including kindergarten, that teaches basic principles focused on reading, writing, and math. This definition is key to understanding the “why” of using bibliotherapy in an elementary classroom. Learning Disabilities (LD) are defined as “a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (Specific Learning Disabilities, 2014). ADHD refers to students who are overly active and have difficulty staying focused, paying attention, and controlling behavior. It is one of the most common childhood disorders. The last important term to understand is bullying, which is defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involve a real or perceived power imbalance” (Bullying Definition, 2014). An understanding of these terms will be important for later discussions.

**Who Needs Bibliotherapy and Who May Facilitate It**

Bibliotherapy can be taught and used by almost all educators but is most effective and useful when done by three types of professionals: counselors, teachers, and librarians. Each plays a different role in educating students. No matter which school specialist facilitates bibliotherapy, the important thing is that the books used “provide accurate information about the target behavior or situation and do not provide the student with unrealistic expectations or a false sense of hope” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 93).

Counselors, spend a lot of time working with students to talk through problems and overcome emotional events. “Counselors are ideal facilitators for discussions of stories, since they have professional skills in active listening, clarification of content, and reflection of feeling” (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). When a counselor is the facilitator of bibliotherapy, he or she is especially skilled at helping children make connections between themselves and characters in a book. The counselor works with the student as a guide and offers perspective on the student’s relationships with others. In order to successfully guide the student, the counselor works with librarians, teachers, the child, and the child’s parents to pick the proper books for the student to work with. As the child reads the book and begins to identify with the characters, the guidance counselor focuses in on a specific skill that the child needs and builds on that topic (Borders & Paisley, 1992, p. 131). When a counselor works in conjunction with librarians, the two are selecting literature that can be the most beneficial for the problem the student is experiencing.

Librarians hold a distinct job in the bibliotherapy method because they are seen as experts on topic matter. First, they are the keepers of the library. The library is a place for people to find free access to a multitude of self-help books. The librarian is the person who selects each book that is placed in the library and therefore must be trained to know the types of books people will find interesting and helpful (Brewster, 2008, p. 172). Secondly, the librarian must be a subject matter expert because in some cases, the librarian is the one working with the teacher and counselor to provide and teach bibliotherapy strategies to students. For this reason, he or she must not only be familiar with every piece of literature in the library, but must also be knowledgeable on the research and practices of bibliotherapy. He or she must know the books that should be used with students for specific issues they are facing (Catalano, 2008, p. 20). For example, when helping a student with ADHD, the librarian would choose a piece of literature that the student can relate to such as *Eukee the Jumpy, Jumpy Elephant* by E. Trevino and C. Corman. This book is about an elephant named Eukee who gets in trouble at school and at home because he can’t sit still and struggles to follow directions (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 96). The importance of understanding which books to choose creates the best compatibility between the student and the piece of literature.

“The librarian should be aware of issues in schools and the community that are likely to be addressed by teachers. “A librarian whose goal is to help students does not avoid those topics that are controversial or uncomfortable to address, such as teen sexuality” (Catalano, 2008, p. 21). Librarians need to be aware of all issues in their school because they will either need to secure literature for the library that is useful for specific topics, or pull out books that will be useful to teachers in their lessons related to a particular skill or problem. When a teacher is ready to address a topic, he or she discusses the topic with the librarian and asks him or her to develop a list of potential books that could be used for that bibliotherapy topic. Based on the grade level the teacher is instructing and the age of his or her students, the librarian’s job is “to evaluate popular literature for developmental appropriateness, content, and accuracy, as well as evaluate the authority of a work” (Catalano, 2008, p. 21). Just because a book is about the topic of interest, does not mean it will be meaningful to the student or useful to the teacher. Students must understand the story line and wording of a book in order to properly relate to it. The librarian’s role in bibliotherapy implementation and research is unique. He or she must be the teacher and the provider. This is the person other school officials will turn to when determining the materials and methods for using bibliotherapy in the classroom (Catalano, 2008, p. 21).

Another important person in the methodology of bibliotherapy is the teacher. Both special education and general education teachers have a duty to teach bibliotherapy lessons to students who are in need of specific skills. Teachers can use bibliotherapy to focus not only on subjects that deal with emotional crises such as death, illness, or divorce, but also on topics such as sharing, or acceptance. A major use of bibliotherapy by inclusive classroom teachers now is, acceptance. They use books to help students learn about individuals who are different and to also help each student develop empathy and acceptance. Bibliotherapy, in these cases, can be used to teach students that we are all different and have our own special abilities (Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008, p. 23).

Bibliotherapy is a practice that can be used by beginning teachers and experienced teachers alike. All teachers must develop this professional practice through analytical review. The importance of developing bibliotherapeutic practices not only benefits students but teachers as well. As teachers educate students on skills using bibliotherapy, they, too, learn about the topic and face their own insecurities. This is becoming especially beneficial for teachers working for the first time with students who have specific disabilities because both students and teachers can be nervous about the situation (Morawski, 1997, p. 245). Teachers must understand which strategies to use and which books to pick in order to be most effective in their bibliotherapy practices.

Besides teachers, librarians, and counselors, another newly integral group of people in the bibliotherapy process are parents. Parents are beginning to see the benefits of using bibliotherapy at home to help children work on skills and manage emotional issues. “Bibliotherapy has found a widening audience of parents who view books as essential tools of child rearing and who also want to encourage their children to read” (Lawson, 1990). The involvement of parents in bibliotherapy is important for collaboration between students’ school and home life.

There would be no demand for bibliotherapy if there were no individuals to benefit from its practices. Anyone can benefit from bibliotherapy but it’s most common uses are helping individuals cope with grief, bullying, and learning acceptance and tolerance. Students with disabilities such as ADHD or Learning Disabilities can benefit from bibliotherapy as can students who are gifted and talented because it teaches them how to act in various social situations.

Students with ADHD benefit from the use of bibliotherapy to help them learn how to control their energy and attention spans. Although people with ADHD are smart, many have difficulty controlling their behaviors in social situations. When reading bibliotherapy books, they can relate to the story characters and pick up ideas for different techniques they can use to regain control of their behavior. A great example of a book for elementary students with ADHD is *It’s Hard to Be a Verb* by Julia Cook. In many cases, students with ADHD have difficulty understanding and verbalizing their behavioral responses to situations (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92).

Students with learning disabilities who struggle in a specific subject area can benefit from bibliotherapy and learn to be confident in their own abilities and realize that other people struggle in the same ways they do. “Bibliotherapy can be used more extensively for students with significant learning and behavior problems to enhance self-understanding, and as a tool for enhancing reading comprehension” (Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006, p. 210). By understanding his or her own disability, students are able to find help by relating to the characters in a bibliotherapeutic book. An example of a book that is great for addressing learning disabilities is *I Am Not Dumb* by A. Motiar (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 99).

“Gifted and talented girls often face emotional issues not met by other girls their age. There are high expectations for them by their parents, but their friends and sometimes their teachers, expect them to perform like their peers (Catalano, 2008, p. 19). Gifted and talented students, although smart, sometimes struggle in social situations because they do not know how to relate to their peers. For this reason, students who are gifted and talented can benefit from bibliotherapy because they can read books that portray similar characters and demonstrate how to engage with peers in social situations. Students with disabilities are not the only ones who benefit from bibliotherapy, however, because all students can find this method beneficial at one point or another. Bibliotherapy is useful for teaching social skills and tasks as noted earlier (Catalano, 2008).

Bibliotherapy is useful for dealing with a multitude of emotional problems and social skills. The two most common emotional problems are grief and bullying. Grief is something everyone experiences at one point or another and it is extremely important for students to understand that it is okay to feel sorrow and talk about it (Manifold, 2007, p. 20). Events such as parents’ divorce or death of a loved one can cause students to express sadness. In moments of emotional turmoil, students will have a number of questions running through their heads and might struggle to maintain control of their actions. Death is something that happens in everyone’s life. “When death separates a child form a loved one, in the child’s despairing loneliness, she may wonder…Who will I love and who will love me now that my beloved is gone” (Manifold, 2007, p. 20). In cases like this, it is important for students to know that they are well loved and that it is okay to grieve when they experience loss. When using bibliotherapy for these purposes, it is important to choose a book about showing the loss of the same family member or parents getting divorced so that the student can make the necessary connections and begin his or her healing process. An example of a book that can benefit students who experienced death is *Carmine the Crow* by Heidi Holder (Manifold, 2007, p. 21).

Bullying, like grief, can cause a person to feel as if he or she is not in control of his or her emotions. It is seen as the number-one concern of educators, parents, children, and health care providers (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 127). This number-one concern makes it evident that bullying is a large problem in schools and affects many students. Some of the largest forms of bullying at the elementary level are name-calling and teasing. “Teasing and name-calling are unfortunate realities for many children in our schools. This is not only emotionally painful, but can undermine the sense of self-confidence and competence that students need to succeed academically” (Duimstra, 2003, p. 8). Any student can become involved in a bullying situation as the bully, the victim or the bystander. The bully is the person doing the unwanted behaviors to the victim and the bystander is the student who sees the behaviors occurring but, in many cases, does nothing because he or she doesn’t know what to do. “Bibliotherapy holds promise as a potential tool to strengthen positive, supportive, and inclusive classroom environments, in particular educating and involving bystanders in more actively supporting victims” (Moulton, Heath, Prater, & Dyches, 2011, p. 122). If students are aware of strategies they can use to help stop bullying, they are more likely to step in and try to do something; the very principle of bibliotherapy.

**Bibliotherapy Materials, Strategies and Activities**

A number of materials, strategies, and activities are available for carrying out a successful bibliotherapy program. Materials include literature sources, manipulatives, and activity books. Sources of literature are the books read by teachers to students or by students silently and are the suppliers of the connections between the student and the storybook character. Activity books are manuals used by teachers to narrow down activities they would like students to do, or by students as a follow-up to reading a book. Manipulatives are the objects that aid in the production of bibliotherapy. Sometimes manipulatives are simple items such as stuffed animals that students can cuddle as they read the book and work through the issue (Catalano, 2008, p. 17).

Strategies are the courses of action that school officials take in order to properly and effectively assist students in bibliotherapy practices. Regardless of which strategy is used, instruction is an important factor when determining how effective a bibliotherapy lesson will be. The type of instruction used within an educational environmental can include whole class, individual, or small group. Typically the setting chosen is the classroom, the counselor’s office, or the library (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). One strategy that is widely used is an interactive process with guided discussions. In this strategy, the student reads a book either alone or with the teacher and then the teacher leads the student in a discussion over the book to help make connections between the characters and the child. A second strategy for helping students learn to identify with characters in the book is to work with the student to pick out the theme and coping strategies that are used in the story (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17).

The third most commonly used strategy is literature circles. These are small groups of students who read the same book or read about the same topic. They allow students to interact and discuss the selected books that are of interest to them. Students may read books individually and discuss with the group, or read books together. In this type of environment, children have a high opportunity for success as they relate to not only the book, but also the other students in their group (Stringer, Reynolds, & Simpson, 2003, p. 70). After a small-group session, students take part in a teacher-directed discussion. This discussion allows the teacher to see the level of achievement and the types of connections made (Stringer, Reynolds, & Simpson, 2003, p. 70).

In order for any of the strategies to be successful, there must be collaboration and interaction between teachers, counselors, and students. “The interaction of bibliotherapy, meaning the interpersonal connections formed between students and facilitators, must more so than the reading, be the key to bibliotherapy’s success” (Schreur, 2006, p. 108). Without the collaboration of all individuals involved, the goals of bibliotherapy cannot be met. The strategies and activities that teachers use in the method go hand in hand. Almost any activity done in the classroom can be tweaked and changed to make it useful and beneficial to bibliotherapy. Janice Nicholson, a professor of elementary education, and Quinn Pearson, a professor of counselor education, developed a list of creative activities that can be used by teachers when practicing bibliotherapy. “These activities include art activities, dramatization, pantomiming, puppetry, role playing, and written responses” (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17). They furthered their list later in the article, adding: reading aloud, composing a letter or book, and constructing collages (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 17). No activity is confined to one specific subject; each can be modified for use both with and without bibliotherapy. The professors created a list of activities to engage children and help them relate to bibliotherapy stories on a higher personal level.

Activities not named specifically on Nicholson and Pearson’s list are follow-up activities, which are especially important. They are “designed to elicit an understanding of the problem and encourage the student to provide a solution to the presented problem or situation” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). Follow-up activities give students a plan and guidelines on how to make the final connections with the book. By having students provide a solution, teachers have students think about how they will handle the issue they are experiencing in real life. This type of activity is great for determining students’ coping methods (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). It is important in the bibliotherapy process to use activities before reading, during the use of all strategies, and after reading a bibliotherapy book (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 94). Follow-up activities are what tie the lesson together and reveal the true meaning of the book and help students build the necessary connections.

**How to Implement Bibliotherapy**

Learning how to implement bibliotherapy properly is necessary to have the process reach its full potential in the classroom. To implement the bibliotherapy practice effectively, it is important to understand how to identify students who need bibliotherapy and know the models that teachers can use. Facilitators must understand that “in school, bibliotherapy was more effective as a contributor to a group or individual therapeutic treatment than as an isolated intervention. Hence, we need to turn to a collaborative interactive model with clearly defined student, teacher, and counselor roles” (Wolpow, 2001, p. 606). Mediators must recognize that bibliotherapy is a helpful method not a disciplinary method. It should be used to help students cope with and recognize their own problems. The adult must first identify a need or problem in the child’s life. Common examples in elementary school are parents’ divorce or adjusting to a new sibling. The adult must then carefully choose a book to fit the student’s reading level, and cognitive awareness, but that will also spark interest and match the student’s need. If the book doesn’t match the student, the three stages of developmental bibliotherapy will be unsuccessful (Stamps, 2003, p. 27). After identifying the type of book they want to use, the teacher must understand the process for implementing developmental bibliotherapy.

The three stages of the developmental bibliotherapy implementation process are identification, catharsis, and insight. “Identification is the process of affiliating some real or fictional character with oneself. To facilitate this step, students should be encouraged to recall relevant incidents from their own lives” (Catalano, 2008, p. 18). The identification process is where the student forms his or her initial connection with the book’s characters. Catharsis happens if the child is able to build the connection. The student begins to relate events from their own life with the character and in doing so, begins to release built up emotions. The catharsis stage is often followed by follow-up activities to help students connect all the pieces (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 129). The final stage, insight, is when the student evaluates the relationship he or she has built with the main character. He or she begins to make comparisons between themselves and the character. The insight stage cannot occur until all the student’s emotional tension has been relieved so that he or she may think clearly. This stage helps children to address the attitudes and behaviors (Morawski, 1997). Each of the three steps must occur in order for the bibliotherapy process to be successful.

To address their three stages of developmental bibliotherapy, Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, and Johnstun developed a ten-step model for implementation. Step one is to develop rapport, trust, and confidence with the student. This is done before bibliotherapy is ever introduced. The teacher needs to ensure that the student trusts the teacher and feels secure with him or her. A way to develop step one is for the teacher to try to get to know the student. Step two is to identify the other school officials who could assist the teacher. Collaboration is one of the main components of bibliotherapy and it is therefore important for teachers to know that they are not alone. Teachers can identify other adults who can aid them in a successful bibliotherapeutic process.

The third step is to solicit support from the student’s parents; the people who know the child better than anyone. Parents can supply a history of the child’s behavior. Teachers need to be careful when determining whether or not to include step three in the model if the parents are a contributing factor to the child’s problem. Next, in step four, the teacher must define the specific problem that the student is experiencing. The teacher can only focus on the difficulties of the student at school in step four. Step five is to create goals and activities to address the problem. The teacher sets goals for the student’s behaviors and determines if bibliotherapy will be an effective process to use with that particular student. The teacher decides if this problem needs to be addressed individually, in a small group, or as an entire class (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p.7).

After completing steps one through five of the bibliotherapy model, the teacher can move on to steps six through ten. Step six is to research and select books appropriate for the situation. This is when the teacher works with counselors and librarians to select the type and level of book that will be effective for a specific student. The books must be age, grade, and reading level appropriate and must portray the topic of interest. Step seven is to introduce the book to the student. In this step, the teacher leads students in pre-reading techniques and previews the book. The teacher talks to the student about the problem or behavior he or she has noticed before reading the book.

Step eight is to incorporate reading strategies. Any reading strategy can be used in this step. As the child reads the book or is read to, he or she practices the reading strategies picked by the teacher. The purpose of this step is to help the student relate to the characters in the book. An example of a reading strategy is a Venn-diagram comparing and contrasting the characters to the child. The ninth step is to implement post-reading activities. After finishing a book, “the teacher can engage students in post-reading activities focused on relating to the story and expressing their personal feelings and experiences” (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 9). The activities in this step are the same as ones discussed in the previous section. The last step is to evaluate the effects of bibliotherapy on the student. This is done by the teacher and other adults involved. They evaluate each step and determine what can be improved for the next time. The ten-step model for bibliotherapy is the universal plan for how school officials can properly implement the bibliotherapy process into the classroom and make it effective for students (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006, p. 8-9).

**Why Use Bibliotherapy?**

Bibliotherapy is useful with an entire class because “it allows those students to empathize with those who suffer anxieties created by childhood traumas. Students can develop problem-solving skills whether they have experienced these traumas themselves” (Catalano, 2008, p. 18). By using whole class instruction, teachers are allowing students to learn and gain knowledge from each other; they see that they are not the only ones dealing with a problem. “One of the primary reasons bibliotherapy is effective in the school setting is that it recognizes that teachers, librarians, and school counselors know and understand their students’ academic, social, and emotional needs (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). When students feel they are understood not only by their peers but by their teachers as well, they are more likely to take the process seriously and find it useful. Bibliotherapy builds trust between students and teachers.

There are six goals teachers can work toward when implementing bibliotherapy into their elementary classroom: provide information to students; deliver insight on a specific experience or issue; give students replacement solutions to a problem; stimulate discussion about the real problem, and finally link new values and attitudes with regard to the issue. The last goal aids students in understanding that they are not the only ones experiencing this crisis (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 92). If a teacher to meet any one of these goals, bibliotherapy can be extremely affective.

In addition to the six goals for teachers, there are six benefits for students. “Less physical violence in the classroom, less name-calling, fewer put-downs, improved conflict-resolution strategies, increased sensitivity to peers, and increased ability to listen to peers” (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 95). The most promising benefit not listed above is the capability of the pupils to identify with and get a better understanding of their individual characteristics and reactions. Bibliotherapy develops a sense of self-awareness and empathy for everyone who is involved in the process (Cook, Earles-Vollrath, & Ganz, 2006, p. 95). When the teacher is selecting topics that will be beneficial to the entire class, they must be careful to pick subjects that are developmental in nature. When topics are developmental, they allow students to grow and learn from the books, their peers, and themselves (Forgan, 2002, p. 79-80).

In terms of specific skills or issues that need to be identified in bibliotherapy, Katherine E. Gregory and Judith A. Vessey stated “this method is useful for communicating information about teasing and bullying, helping children learn empathy for one another, and providing them with strategies for deflecting or minimizing bullying attempts” (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 127). This is evidence that teachers should use bibliotherapy as a way to push communication and awareness of issues in the school. Students can learn that these problems are not acceptable and they do not have to put up with them.

One negative outcome of some bibliotherapy attempts is that “the effectiveness of the approach was limited only by the availability of materials on certain topics and client readiness and willingness to read” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). When schools do not have enough materials on specific topics, students are unable to properly work through the stages of bibliotherapy. To counteract this problem, school officials must work together to properly plan and implement the process and make sure books are available that contain the necessary materials for success. A second factor that can compromise a successful bibliotherapy outcome is that facilitators do not always have adequate knowledge on child development and developmental issues. All facilitators should have some background knowledge and training on human development before beginning bibliotherapy with students. A third factor that can turn into a negative is the literature chosen. If a book is too sophisticated or too immature for the student, he or she will not find the literature useful and will not engage in the stages of developmental bibliotherapy (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

There are multiple benefits of using bibliotherapy. A major one is that “it provides the opportunity for the participants to more fully recognize themselves or certain characteristics they have such as shyness or envy” (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). Whether using bibliotherapy with the whole class, small groups, or individuals, students can learn a lot about themselves that is important for development. Bibliotherapy also provides students with a way to release all of their built up emotions because as stated before, he or she is able to see that they are not the only one going through the experience (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). For special educators, a benefit of bibliotherapy is “to help exceptional children better understand themselves and their feeling and as a counseling strategy within the classroom to meet social and emotional needs” (Lenkowsky, 2001, p. 123). Students with disabilities are aided by bibliotherapy as they learn more about their disability and gain knowledge on how to act in certain situations. The last major benefit of bibliotherapy is teacher development. When teachers are involved in the process, they become role models for students and help connect the content of books to real life. Teachers can help students think through the content and make a clear relationship (Morawski, 1997). Overall, the entire school environment can benefit from the use of bibliotherapy in the elementary classroom.

**Conclusion**

Whether the facilitator of bibliotherapy is the general education teacher, special education teacher, counselor, librarian, or any other school professional, the process of bibliotherapy can be successful. The facilitator needs to have the proper knowledge about child development and work with other school officials to learn about specific topics and books that are related to problems students have. All students could benefit from bibliotherapy at some point in their lives. When facilitators decide there is a need for bibliotherapy in their elementary classrooms, they can choose from a variety of materials, strategies, and activities to make the process more effective. The methods and processes of implementing these strategies and activities into lessons are important factors in the effectiveness of bibliotherapy.

Although not all students will relate to books in the same way or find bibliotherapy useful, it is important for teachers to understand the pros and cons to determine when it is an appropriate time to use the process. The books selected need to match the student’s intellect and topics of interest. Most importantly, however, is the trust that must be built between the child and the teacher. If students trust their teachers, they will trust the teacher’s practices such as bibliotherapy. This literature review identified the history and definition of bibliotherapy along with the who, what, how, and why/assessment factors of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is a process that is becoming widely popular in the elementary classroom and will be one that I will use in my future classroom.

I recommend that teachers, who are considering the use of bibliotherapy in their classrooms, get to know each student individually in order to identify which ones would benefit from the process. When implementing bibliotherapy into the classroom, be sensitive to students’ needs and feelings so that no child feels inferior; trust is one of the most important factors. Work with other teachers; collaboration is an essential part of the entire teaching profession. Most importantly, follow the ten-step model to bibliotherapy in order to properly implement the procedure each time and make it more effective as its use continues in the elementary classroom. Books can be both entertaining and therapeutic for students.

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