

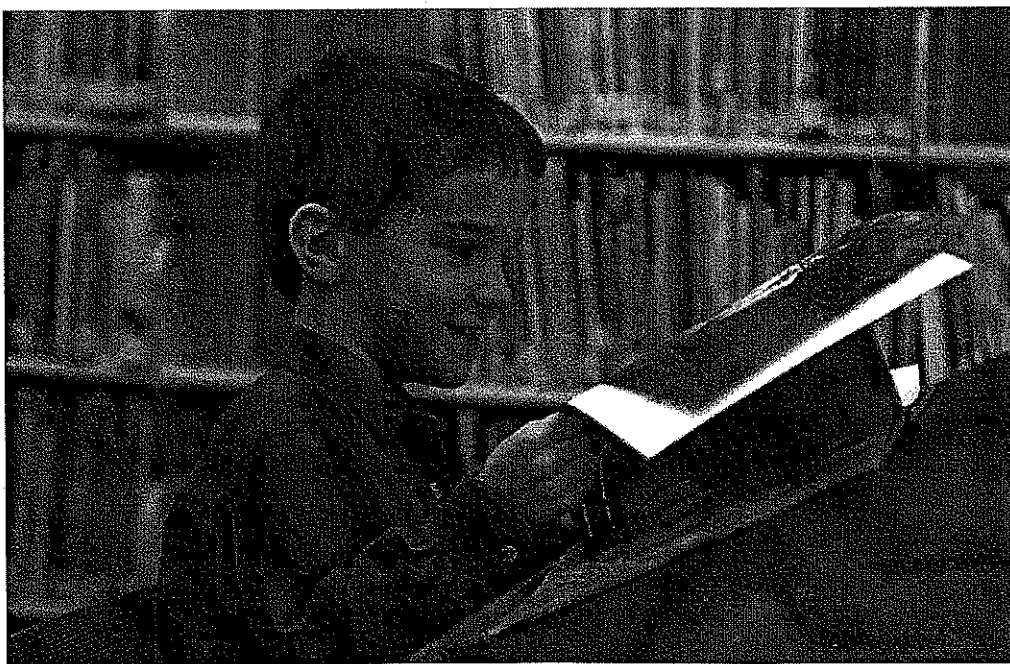
Bibliotherapy: An Introduction for Counsellors

Bibliotherapy is just one of the many tools we can use in counselling. This article provides a brief overview of what bibliotherapy entails and how one might use it in work with children.

Uses

There are a variety of issues and ages for which bibliotherapy may prove effective with children.

Forgan (2002) studied the use of bibliotherapy with students who have behavioural difficulties. These children often have poor problem-solving skills, and fictional stories provide a nonthreatening way for them to discuss the issues faced by the characters. Alternative solutions can also be discussed, and children can “try out” possible actions in a safe, fun and creative manner.



Bibliotherapy has been used extensively with grieving children, again serving to decrease the child's isolation and enable him or her to name and explore feelings (Berns 2003/04).

Additionally, the use of literature has been identified as being especially effective with gifted students and those who have issues with perfectionism (Silverman 1993). Adderholdt-Elliott and Eller (1989) found that bibliotherapy is especially effective with gifted children, who often have keen insight.

For older students, the use of stories and literature can help break the silence around such difficult subjects as homosexuality and abuse (Vare and Norton 2004).

Possible Process

Prater et al (2006), in their excellent article, provide a list of suitable articles and a 10-step system for bibliotherapy. The most important aspect for successful bibliotherapy is book selection. Books should never be didactic or preachy, but they must have all the qualities of good literature. The characters should evoke empathy, the plot should be realistic, and creative problem solving should be evident. The child's age and reading level must also be considered.

While reading the book, the teacher or counsellor can work with the student to predict outcomes or develop alternative solutions. Global questions about the characters' feelings and more specific questions about content can be asked. Having the student write in a journal often works especially well. The student can discuss how the character feels and how he or she might feel in a similar

situation. Activities such as creating Venn diagrams or character weaves can connect the story to a child's experiences. Creative post-reading projects using art, drama and writing are also effective. For example, the student can make a collage of pictures or words to represent feelings or experiences in the story. Scenes can be drawn or sculpted. Children can also write a letter to a character, create an alternative ending or rewrite another part of the story. He or she might also choose to write about a character's life at some point in the future or discuss similarities or differences.


Bibliotherapy is not the only tool in our counselling tool box, but it is certainly an interesting and powerful technique. It offers remarkable versatility and can be a powerful adjunct to therapy.

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