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A Role for Bibliotherapy in Teacher Education

Cynthia M. Morawski

In order to engage effectively in their ongoing decision-making about classroom management, learning difficulties, parental concerns, language instruction and curriculum design, teachers not only need to acquire relevant practical and theoretical knowledge. They must also learn to critically examine and reconstruct their perceptions of their own performance. The process of self-examination needs to be actively acknowledged and addressed in the development and implementation of the teacher education curriculum.

Bibliotherapy, viewed here as the guided reading of written materials to help the reader grow in self-awareness (Harris and Hodges, 1995) can play an instrumental role in helping both beginning and experienced teachers think about their professional practice through critical inquiry. The purpose of this paper is to present an approach to integrating bibliotherapy into teacher education courses at both the preservice and inservice levels. The paper includes theory relevant to bibliotherapy, while emphasizing practical applications for engaging teachers in self-actualization through bibliotherapy. Recommended readings for teacher education bibliotherapeutic experiences are included in the appendices.

Bibliotherapy for teachers

When used in concert with other forms of support, bibliotherapy can play an instrumental role in both personal and professional development. Bibliotherapy has been successfully applied to a variety of educational areas such as family counseling (Sheridan, Baker, and de Lissovoy, 1984; Manning and Manning, 1984), social skills development (Nickolai-Mays, 1987; Lenkowsky and Lenkowsky, 1978), and curriculum planning for the gifted (Hebert, 1991; Adderholt-Elliott and Eller, 1989). Teacher education is another important area where the instructional potential of bibliotherapy has been recognized.

Employing a phenomenological framework for viewing teacher education, Hunsburger (1985) recommended the use of novels to understand what children experience as they learn to read. "Authors, by whatever mixture of memory, insight and imagination, allow us to see through the eyes of others, and since all authors were once children, revelations of child life abound" (p. 11). The various instructional situations that Scout Finch encounters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* were used by Hunsburger to illustrate the insights about children's literacy development that teachers can gain from this practice.

The use of juvenile literature for educating mainstream teachers about students with special needs was advocated by Hildreth (1992). She stated that, "Books written about children and adolescents with learning disabilities examine the cause of the learning disability, experiences of academic failure, remediation, affective development, and family reaction." (p. 25) Such information can complement and reinforce other forms of related knowledge regarding special education that teachers obtain from inservice support.

In her content area reading course, Daisey (1993) "provided opportunities for [her] preservice students to consider reading as therapeutic by comparing the comfort provided by reading and students' content area experiences." (p. 438) Reading aloud selected content area passages, and sharing personal feelings and reactions to special books were two specific procedures that she employed to engage students in the process of bibliotherapy.

Colvin (1994) introduced an activity in which she used images from literature to guide new teachers through various stages of composing a more formal teaching philosophy. In particular, this activity "enabled the... teachers to reflect often on the basis for their practice and the ways in which their actions are influenced in the classroom" (p. 683).

As part of an affective component for developing the instructional potential of teachers in the content areas, Morawski (1995) proposed the use of bibliotherapy. Through vicarious involvement with books and other written materials, teachers can gain significant knowledge about their students as well as themselves. "In particular, bibliotherapy can not only help teachers contend with the demands of teaching reading-disabled students, but it can also provide assistance to teachers who are coping with their own insecurities related to the reading process" (Morawski, 1995, p. 338).

This paper proposes an approach to bibliotherapy that will develop further its application to teacher education at both the preservice and inservice levels. The approach takes into account both the most relevant psychological theory and the recognized stages of bibliotherapy. It includes reading aloud, instructor-initiated readings, teacher-initiated readings, guided independent reading, and collaborative inquiry. Each of these elements is described along with guidelines for

engaging teachers in critical self-exploration and action within the context of bibliotherapy.

Psychological theory supporting bibliotherapy

According to Adler's Individual Psychology, individuals are indivisible, social, decision-making beings whose behavior is goal-oriented and purposive (Corsini, 1973). Although people all exist in the same world, each person (for a variety of reasons) tends to perceive it differently (Adler, 1930, p. 6). In particular, individuals' perceptions, based on their subjective interpretations of life events, affect the choices they make. In the case of teachers, these perceptions are bound to influence participation in teaching and learning.

For example, one teacher who misperceived herself as an ineffective reader avoided the use of content area reading strategies for instructional purposes. Another teacher who mistakenly viewed himself as incapable of meeting the needs of students with kinesthetic learning styles, resisted the notion of mainstreaming for his class.

In essence, behavior is a function of perception (Dinkmeyer, Pew, and Dinkmeyer, 1979, p. 15). Critical examination of personal and professional perceptions within a supportive social context such as an inservice course, can help teachers to reach a more conscious understanding of their actions in the educational setting. As a result, they will be in a better position to identify and consider alternate points of view and behaviors needed to contend with the many challenges of teaching.

Stages of self development in bibliotherapy

Three interdependent stages of self development, (i) identification, (ii) catharsis, and (iii) insight, have been consistently associated with the bibliotherapeutic process

(Adderholdt-Elliott and Eller, 1989; Cianciolo, 1965, Hebert, 1991, Hoaglund, 1972; Lenkowsky and Lenkowsky, 1978; Manning and Manning, 1984; Russell and Russell, 1979). These stages can provide some structure for the basic issues to be addressed to participants in bibliotherapeutic discussions.

Identification. "Affiliating some real or fictional character with oneself or associates" (Cianciolo, 1965, p. 898) would be an important step in confronting a personal or professional issue by way of a written work. "Most of our actions are the consequences of thinking processes that we don't recognize and often prefer not to know but that, nevertheless, have a definite influence on our actions" (Dinkmeyer, Pew, and Dinkmeyer, p. 27). Examining the behaviors and related motives of another individual can act as a transition into the exploration of one's own perceptions and actions. To facilitate identification, teachers should be encouraged to recall relevant incidents from their own lives such as early recollections of learning to read (Morawski and Brunhuber, 1995).

Catharsis. "A valuable help in self-examination, which may be mainly intellectual but may also strike at a deep emotional level, is the reading of books [and other works] written by compassionate people who have made some progress in their own painful struggle to know themselves," (Jersild, p. 83) and others. As the character, "works through a problem and releases emotional tension," (Cianciolo, 1965, p. 898) identification becomes further established. Consequently, teachers are more receptive to profit from the emotional content of a reading. Addressing the feelings associated with their relevant incidents recalled during the identification stage would help them to experience and benefit from catharsis in relation to their own personal and professional lives. For example, many teachers may associate feelings of satisfaction with their

early literacy experiences while some others may recall apprehension and anxiety (Morawski and Brunhuber, 1995).

Insight. After having been freed from some of their own emotional tension, individuals are more open to approach a problem on an intellectual level (Cianciolo, 1965). "Through emphathizing with a character, the plot, the relationship, or a piece of information of the readings, [they] come to a better understanding of [their] own motivations or achieve an awareness of something applicable to [their] own life." (Hoaglund, 1972, p. 391) The reasons behind attitudes and behaviors, including the history of their formation, can then be addressed.

In the case of teachers, seeming opposition to recent or renewed educational practices, such as literature-based instruction and inclusive education, can be examined. A lack of exposure to children's classics or misperceived inequality in early sibling relationships are some specific examples of explanations that could be uncovered here. When this level of self-understanding has been reached, teachers are better prepared to respond consciously and productively to educational changes such as the introduction of new practices and theories.

Reading aloud

For many years, recognition has been given to the importance of reading aloud to children and adolescents (Butler, 1982; Robinson, 1992; Trelease, 1995). More recently, the value of reading aloud to adults, particularly teachers, has been acknowledged (Richardson, 1994; Wood, 1994). Various aspects of teachers' ongoing literacy development, such as awareness of textual rhythm and knowledge of symbolic meaning, can be enriched by listening to different kinds of fictional and nonfictional pieces. "In particular, when a written work is shared

aloud, it begins to live in ... [people's] lives and extends beyond the bounds of the book. In the outside world, we notice things that we hadn't noticed before." (Wood, 1994, p. 348) Routine oral reading of relevant works to teachers, then, would be an important practice for involving them in the three stages of bibliotherapy.

Instructor-initiated readings

In order to facilitate self-actualization, instructor-initiated readings need to be pertinent, consistent and efficient. Selected works, related directly to the topics of study, should be included at specific times on a regular basis. In general, reading by the instructor should be limited to one or two brief selections such as a children's picture book on sibling relationships or an individual's early memories of learning to write. It is crucial that works represent a variety of perspectives. For example, a class on compulsive-hyperactive behavior could begin with a poem by a child with ADHD and end with a one-page excerpt from a book by a school psychologist.

Instructor-initiated reading should be a time for quiet reflection and critical discussion. Teachers need to be provided with different options for responding to the material and sharing their thoughts and feelings. These options can take such forms as active listening, journal writing, and discussions. For example, at the conclusion of each reading, teachers can write about their reactions in a journal, which they maintain throughout the course. These responses can be used as the working material for periodic small-group discussions. At other times, simply listening to a moving piece is sufficient. More structured practices such as "the reader as problem-maker (Leggo, 1991) and "student-made questions (Ash, 1992) can assist teachers to develop further their repertoire of responses.

Instructor-initiated reading is especially effective for introducing teaches to the bibliotherapeutic process. During the early stages, the instructor can act as a role-model, sharing the reasons for selecting a work as well as conveying her or his own related responses.

Teacher-initiated reading

After they have experienced the benefits of bibliotherapy, teachers can be invited to take more responsibility for its implementation in the course. It is important to note that many teachers approach reading tasks with confidence while others may not feel comfortable participating in the process (Morawski and Brunhuber, 1995). Therefore, teachers should be provided with a variety of possible activities to encourage their active involvement in the bibliotherapeutic component of the course. Examples of such activities can range from the selection and reading of an essay to the compilation of an annotated bibliography of relevant works. Even showing an animated version of a children's classic or sharing a self-made or commercial audio cassette of a story would be appropriate choices, especially for a reluctant reader.

One major advantage of teacher-initiated reading is the alternative role-modeling that it provides. Seeing their classmates actively involved in bibliotherapy may give some teachers the courage to take a more visible role in the process. Further motivation can emanate from the support offered by collaborating with a classmate. For example, one teacher could read a pertinent excerpt while another could subsequently guide his/her classmates through a short debriefing session that focuses on the examination of their responses and related meanings.

Guided independent reading

In addition to including shorter pieces of reading aloud, assigning longer works such as novels, short stories and autobiographies for independent reading would be valuable for engaging teachers in critical self-exploration by way of bibliotherapy. Longer works are particularly useful because they provide a more-in-depth investigation of specific problems over a longer period of time. "Freedom to linger, or hurry, as we choose, to pause and reflect if we wish, makes a distinct difference from listening to oral language in which the speaker sets the pace" (Hunsburger, 1985, p. 11).

Guiding questions. Providing teachers with a list of guiding questions at the outset of their reading would greatly assist them to explore critically the significance of the work for their own personal and professional development. "What is important about this list is not the specific questions on it, but the nature of the questions, the attitude about literature that is fostered by the questions" (Myers, 1988, p. 65). Specific questions would be aimed at clarifying the teachers' thoughts, examining their emotions, and encouraging their consideration and eventual use of alternative actions. Once teachers become familiar with this procedure, they can then begin to formulate their own questions as they respond to future readings.

To exemplify the kinds of questions that can be used to stimulate critical self-inquiry, the following set has been included. These questions, which are intended to facilitate the study of *Somebody Else's Kids* (Hayden, 1982) in a graduate education course, were developed in consultation with existing recommendations (Cianciolo, 1965; Reid, 1972) for discussing books.

1) Identify at least three critical incidents (positive or negative) that occurred in this book and explain the

significance of each one. Consider the emotions, images, and thoughts that you associated with each incident. Explain.

2) Within the context of each incident, address your current perceptions and practices related to learning and teaching. Did they change? Did they remain the same? Explain.

3) If you could change one incident in this book, what would it be? Explain how this change would have affected the characters and events in the book.

4) Many important issues related to different kinds of learning and teaching practices are addressed throughout the book. Examine one of these issues in relation to different contexts in your own life (e.g., your teaching situation, your current and earlier learning experiences). Consider class discussions, presentations, and recommended readings.

5) What was your general reaction to reading this book?

Collaborative inquiry

"Each reader brings individual experience and understanding to the story and takes away what seems significant" (Hunsburger, 1985, p. 16). However, discussion must take place within a community of learners if teachers are to derive the full benefits from their guided independent reading. "The group setting offers members the opportunity to develop new perceptions of their approach to the basic tasks of life" (Dinkmeyer, Pew, and Dinkmeyer, Jr., 1979, p. 142). Within this forum, an ongoing interchange of thoughts and emotions encourages teachers to re-examine their current perspectives as well as modify their related actions.

For example, hearing a classmate struggle with her own self-doubts about being a teacher of autistic children helped another classmate to face his own fears about working with learning disabled students. With the support of his group members, he came to realize that his constant striving for perfection was limiting his options for growth as an educator. In

response to his realization, he decided to volunteer in the school's resource program, which was intended to assist those students who were experiencing various academic difficulties.

Although many teachers may welcome the chance to learn from the self-exploration of others, they may not always feel comfortable with revealing their own thoughts and feelings in the presence of peers. Therefore, it is essential that different forms of collaborative groupings, specifically whole class, small group, and dyads, are used for critical discussion of a book or other longer work. A larger group may be appropriate and necessary for addressing issues of a more general nature. However, a small group provides "repeated opportunities for ... individuals to share ideas actively as they question, answer, elaborate, and revise informally (Reid, 1972, p. 26). Addressing the assigned questions with a partner or several other classmates before the beginning of a whole class discussion could provide teachers with the courage to express themselves in such a larger situation.

Groups can be formed and maintained throughout the course in a number of ways. For instance, at the time that a novel is assigned to the whole class, small groups can be established for the purpose of discussing the novel on a periodic basis. Toward the end of the course, a full-class discussion could then take place. Alternatively, class members can be given the option of selecting one of several novels, the number of which will depend on the class size. Membership for groupings will be based on the chosen novel with two or more sub-groups for each novel. Sub-groups, which will meet individually to discuss the novel at specific intervals throughout the duration of the course, will later combine for more extensive verbal interaction at the course's conclusion.

Of course, other possibilities exist for the exploration of novels and longer works. For example, a teacher who has an interest in familial relationships that involve siblings and learning difficulties may want to read and react to a book as part of her or his investigation of this subject. Although the valuable learning that could take place in a community of learners would not be available, the course instructor could dialogue with the teacher using brief conferences and journal entries.

Before using a work, it is imperative that the instructor knows the selection well and has decided "that it provides a fair picture of the problem (Lehr, 1981, p. 77). The particular needs of the teachers in the course must be determined as well. Administering a brief questionnaire at the beginning of the course would help to ascertain this information. This questionnaire could contain open-ended and/or specific questions which would depend on the specific course and its intended learning outcomes. For example, the questions used for a methods course on reading could range in focus from the teachers previous coursework in reading education to their own perceptions of themselves as readers. Lehr (1981) and Davison (1983) offer additional guidelines on selecting proper books and related materials for bibliotherapy.

Considerations for implementation

Effective implementation of a bibliotherapeutic component involves the use of theoretical and practical knowledge related to a variety of areas such as counseling and library science. Therefore it is important that instructors take advantage of the resources and expertise that are associated with the education of preservice and inservice teachers. For example, selection of materials can be supported by the education librarian or brookstore associate who can identify appropriate works and suggest specific sources for further consultation.

Information about group process and self-actualization can be obtained from a counseling instructor who could also "act as a guest facilitator for a session on bibliotherapy" (Morawski, 1995, p. 342). Assistance can even be found among the class members who would very likely possess different levels and types of relevant skills. For instance, a teacher librarian can give book talks on pertinent novels while a practicting guidance counselor can act as a co-facilitator for a whole class discussion.

For those instructors who are considering the use of bibliotherapy for the first time, it is best that they integrate the practice into their courses on a gradual basis. Concentrating on one course and selecting only shorter works to read aloud at specific times throughout its duration would be one way of initiating the process. Assigning a short story as part of a unit on a particular topic such as giftedness would be another means by which bibliotherapy could be incorporated into a course on a smaller scale.

Providing time for observation and active reflection would be essential, especially for refining and expanding the usage of bibliotherapy in the teacher education classroom. The analysis of various outcomes, including a teacher's unfavorable reaction to a story or the large amount of debate that was sparked by a poem, would provide invaluable material for the revision of future implementations such as the guided independent readings of autobiographies.

Conclusion

"A teacher is a human being with needs, abilities, beliefs, goals and a heart. Teachers must be able to use their own personality and talents to help their students as well as themselves grow" (Thorpe, 1987, p. 247). Hence, personal and professional transformation is a critical factor in teacher

education, where intrapersonal awareness and growth need to become an integral part of the ongoing construction of knowledge and practice. In particular, teachers need to gain an understanding of their perceptions as well as the influence that these perceptions can have on their attitudes and actions in the educational setting. The approach presented in this article can provide preservice and inservice teacher educators with specific theoretical and practical means by which this goal could be actively and consciously achieved through the integration of bibliotherapy into their courses.

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Appendix
Recommended Readings about Teaching

Cooper, S. (1995). Sarah's story. *The Reading Teacher, 48,* 633. A kindergarten teacher's reflection on her response to a Downs syndrome girl's membership in her class, from initial reluctance to personal growth as an educator. Teacher self-awareness and development. Oral reading.

DeJong, M. (1954). *The wheel on the school.* NY: Harper Trophy. A Newbery Aware book about an elementary school teacher who, inspired by one of his students, eventually involves the whole fishing village in significant learning experiences surrounding collaborative efforts of attracting a crane to a rooftop. Curriculum innovation. For silent reading.

Hayden, T. (1980). *One child.* NY: Avon. Hayden presents an insightful account of her personal and professional struggle to reach one of her students — a six-year-old gifted girl whose background, filled with neglect, abuse, and desertion, thwarted the realization and actualization of her full learning potential. Child abuse. Silent reading.

Hayden, T. (1995). *The tiger's child.* NY: Avon. In the sequel to *One child,* Hayden initiates contact again after seven years and recounts the continuing struggle to reach this girl as an adolescent with definite interests, values, and memories of her past. Self-acceptance via identity formation. Hayden's other books address children of war, mutism, autism, cult victimization, and teenage pregnancy. Silent reading.

Landau, E., Epstein, S., and Stone, A. (Eds.). (1972). *Child development through literature.* Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall. This book is divided into ten thematic sections, each with introductory essays, fictional pieces, and discussion questions concerning relevant topics such as jealousy, death, truth, and discipline. Child development. Silent reading.

Landau, E., Epstein, S., and Stone, A. (Eds.). (1978). *The exceptional child through literature.* Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall. Similar to the previous text, this book concentrates on aspects of exceptionality such as

learning disabilities, behavior difficulties, giftedness, and familial interactions. Exploring exceptionalities. Silent reading.

Natchez, G. (1975). *Gideon: A boy who hates learning in school.* NY: Basic Books. The complexities of a challenged reader's daily struggle to perform and maintain a positive self-image in a third-grade setting, is sensitively portrayed in this fictional work that addresses testing, parental collboration, alternative education, and professional self-introspection. Reading assessment and intervention. Silent reading.

Paley, V. (1990). *The boy who would be a helicopter.* Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press. The integral role that storytelling played in the development of a pre-schooler's self-expression and interpersonal communication is critically examined in this book — his teacher's reflective diary. Story as a learning vehicle. Silent reading.

Robinson, L. (1992). My father. *English Journal, 81,* 70-71. A high school English teacher's recollection about her father and the influence that he had on the development of her teaching practices, particularly the regular use of reading aloud to students. Reflective teacher education. Oral reading.

Rothenberg, M. (1978). *Children with emerald eyes.* NY: Pocket Books. Case studies of children exhibiting severe behavior and communication difficulties are thoughtfully presented by their teacher, a very gifted and reflective practitioner. Critical inquiry. Silent reading.

Ungerleider, D. (1996). *Reading, writing, and rage.* Encino CA: RWR. In this book a reading consultant chronicles a young man's lifelong battle with reading and writing difficulties, focusing on his endless day-to-day challenges such as parent-child relationships, remedial cures, and demeaning remarks. Multidimensional causes of literacy difficulties. Silent reading.

Vail, P. (1987). *Smart kids with school problems.* NY: E.P. Dutton. A very informative book containing personal stories and a wealth of theoretical and practical information concerning intelligent students who experience difficulty in learning. Learning disabled and gifted. Oral reading.