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Reach out to the children through books

The shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story
/Anthony de Mello/

GENERATION Y, GENERATION Z AND WHERE TO PLACE A BOOK

At the beginning of the article the author asks about the role of a school librarian. We work and live in the 21st century in Europe, surrounded by advanced modern technology. We use the Internet, an indispensable means of communication every day and live in the world where all children are educated on a primary level and have access to different sources of information. Moreover, we live in the world where books are taken for granted and are widely accessible.

Author is wondering about the following issues:

1. Is it true that a traditional book, smelling of fresh ink, is being replaced by the modern technology, and is this bad or perhaps not?
2. Isn't a librarian, especially a school one, in the first place a re-reading motivator, a reading enthusiast?
3. How can we bring books closer to the so-called Generation Y and Generation Z?

4. Isn't our goal ethics – impart basic human values to children, empower them for a better, more qualitative life (for themselves and others) by the help of books?
5. And finally: Is a librarian in her/his physical shape still needed to a user – are we on the verge of extinction?

Originating from a dialogic relationship between a reader and a school librarian, author's answers are as follows:

1. Modern technology apparently may be replacing a book in its physical form; however, books will survive as long the last librarian talking to her/his user, survives.
2. No, she/he isn't.
3. Yes, the librarian's primary role is to motivate students for reading.
4. Books can be brought closer to the students from the Generation Y and Generation Z through a dialogue, conversations and choice of interesting books. However, not only the professional side of you, but your human side has to be revealed too.
5. Author believes that our mission is empowering students for a better, more qualitative life, and books play an important role in this mission.

A library user, representative of Generation Y and Generation Z, needs a school librarian to open his/her eyes and heart. It depends on our work and ourselves whether or not we are needed in the future. Our extinction" / "survival", in the first place, depends on ourselves.

Why all these questions, you may ask, life goes on, technology is changing, getting better, e-books are no longer science fiction, but nevertheless... The job of the school librarian is closely connected to (even more than that of the librarian working in a public library...) educating young people, who are the most vulnerable members of society and representatives of our future.

A person educates with his/her attitude, view of the world, beliefs, worldliness and sophistication, holistic view of a person as the person

is a physical as well as mental and spiritual being. Each person needs a fellow man/woman for his/her existence as well as a dialogue, a relationship, through which he/she can satisfy his/her need for closeness and remains a human.

Generation Y denotes people born in the Internet age, following people of Generation X, who were born in the 1970s. The latter were born in the times of struggles for equal rights of women, growing economic problems and rising divorce rates. They appreciate fun in the workplace and espouse a work hard/play hard mentality. As a result, work and relaxation is equally important to them. The generation of Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1960, grew up in an era of reform, economic growth and optimism. They were wealthier and healthier than previous generations, but ready to work hard to succeed. Researchers described them as the generation who lived to work. Generation Y has a tendency to live a more relaxed, leisurely life. They like to claim that work is just a way to get money. They are convinced that they deserve high salaries, even not putting significant efforts to their work. Moreover, they feel that they deserve everything at once.

GENERATION Z ON ITS WAY

Generation Z, or the Internet Generation, is a name for the group of people born from the early or middle 1990s to 2010. The generation has grown up with the World Wide Web, which became increasingly available from 1991 onwards.

We live in the times when the development is very rapid. If we want to prepare our students for the future, we have to take into consideration what all has changed in the last years and what the future holds for them. The representatives of this new Internet generation, who are now at primary schools, have different values and needs than we do. They have been formed under the influence of the new technology. Generation Z is plugged-in 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These young people are well familiar with communications and media technologies such as the World Wide Web, text messaging, MP3 players, smartphones,

social networking etc. Moreover, they have developed new skills such as “zapping”: using a remote control device to switch channels rapidly on a television, and at the end reproducing the content of all these TV programmes. Consequently, the Generation Z has also been called “Homo Zappiens” by some experts. Although their psychological profile is still being studied by scientists, it is already clear that they do not think linearly, unlike their teachers, who still do. Namely, the human brain changes throughout life, which is called neuroplasticity. Due to the modern technology our brains are exposed to a great amount of information, therefore they change.

Therefore, children who are educated nowadays are children who have grown up with technology and take the Internet for granted. It has always been a part of their lives. They can surf on the Internet all the time, “meet” (or better put: collect) new people on Facebook and write whatever crosses their minds in forums. Moreover, they are surrounded, actually “bombed”, with an enormous quantity of information, but above all, their life is under the huge influence of media. Back in the 1950s and 1960s psychologist and social philosopher Erich Fromm was contemplating on how to be the best, the most beautiful, how to fulfil all your needs as best and fast as you can, how to HAVE something and not how to BE someone. A child of the Internet is a child who will be (and already is through parents) a consumer.

However...

A human is a being of relationships, which he/she builds in person, becomes human because of them, learns about himself/herself and the world, and furthermore, tests himself/herself (and grows) in his/her humanity. For your happiness and inner satisfaction (a consumer society is an unsatisfied and never satisfying society) the human needs long-lasting inner satisfaction, which cannot be given by advanced modern technology and a dehumanized society. Therefore, the human is alone, lonely, an individualist in the global world, where all people seem to be connected, but lonely and unfulfilled internally more than ever. Depressive, alienated, indifferent and cold. We long for ourselves, a fellow human being, recognition, warmth and love.

Therefore...

The author decided years ago to “use” a book and herself, as a school librarian, and provide a space for communication through a book, which will enable children:

- to talk to her and his/her peers,
- in-depth reading of quality books and reading discussions,
- to get emotional relief,
- have time dedicated to one another,
- feel well, safe and accepted,
- to build healthy relationships and personality.

That is how we deal with bibliotherapy/biblioprevention in our school.

BIBLIOTHERAPY IN SCHOOLS: THROUGH A BOOK TO A CHILD¹

The idea of healing through books is not new; it can be traced far back to the first libraries in ancient Greece. Use of the term “bibliotherapy” goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when Samuel McChord Crothers (1916) labelled it as such. Most of us recognize the power of therapeutic reading. We find ourselves entering the world described in the pages of a good book or appearing in the scenes of a good movie, and we become involved with the characters. We feel

¹ This chapter is taken from the presentation prepared for the international conference on bibliotherapy “Reading is healing” in India on 10th February 2012, organised by AWIC. The title of the presentation was: “THE POWER OF THE BEAUTY OF WORDS: the influence of reading fiction on children and adolescents through the process of school bibliotherapy”. The paper was not published yet.

happy or sad, we cry with the character who suffers, we want the good ones to cope and the bad ones to be punished; we really care. We usually end up gaining new insights and ideas for our own lives as well. Just reading high-quality literature, then, is a healing process that can enrich our selves (Shechtman Z., 2009, p. 21).

Currently, the bibliotherapy is used by nearly all helping professionals in counselling or instruction, like school counsellors, social workers or health providers as well as teachers and librarians. In the school environment it can be used as an effective method of prevention, while it is more rarely used for therapeutic purposes.

The basic definition of bibliotherapy is *The use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems*. **Webster's dictionary** offers the following definition: *Guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading*. (Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1971, p. 212).

In the school environment bibliotherapy differs from the classical one in clinical premises where it is used as an adjunct to more traditional forms of psychotherapy. "*Enlightenment* is a one-word definition of bibliotherapy which best describes its content" (Zabukovec V., Resman V., Furlan M., 2007, p. 65). "The term bibliotherapy is not appropriate for schools as it does not heal but rather explains. The preferred term would be bibliocounselling which denotes counselling through the use of books or literary works" (ibid.).

In school bibliocounselling, a therapist works with healthy individual students (or groups). Contrary to bibliotherapy proper, it is of shorter duration and, above all, it does not heal. It is focused on present while in clinical settings the patient's past is analysed. A bibliotherapist or bibliocounsellor in schools plays a role of a moderator – words are not a mediator but a trigger of changes.

"Bibliocounselling within the context of a school is characterised as an indirect method of primary prevention. The literary works are used not only for learning and didactic purposes but for the stimulation of emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social development on the horizontal as well as vertical level" (ibid.).

The purpose of our counselling is therefore to trigger the transfer through books which leads to the student's transmission of knowledge into their real life situations.

A counsellor should be well acquainted with youth literature, the didactics of (youth) literature and the literary theory. They should be capable of deep psychological interpretation of a literary text and be familiar with the child's or adolescent's (psychological) development, be skilled in communication and display empathy. The question remains where a counsellor can acquire the required communicative skills for counselling. Some believe that communication skills are learnt through the process of counselling itself, while others claim that prior education in the field is necessary.

School library is a specific (learning) environment. The library visits are not compulsory, the students come if they want to. However, during lessons on library information technology, they are motivated to regularly visit the library.

During lending hours special informal relationships are built which are stronger than the formal ones during instruction. The students are in the environment they have chosen themselves and they tend to be more open and trustful, especially if the librarian is open to them. Through these informal conversations we became aware that there was not enough time for in-depth discussion about the students' problems. So the idea of careful selection, informed assessment, matching material with clients and discussion about good quality youth books works emerged naturally. The school has managed to organise the planned groups of biblioprevention for several sequential years.

The young should be taught to become what they are, entirely what they are. It is the power of the mind. In order to really be what they are they should accept their shadow with arms open wide. It is our shadow we refuse to accept. That darker side of our selves which is so vulnerable to touch. The shadow is, however, fully alive and wants to be accepted. Similarly as the elements of art cannot be discerned in the absence shadows. When the shadow is accepted its power is weakened. This is the way we can cease the inner struggle and admit: 'Yes, really, this is also a

part of me'. The reconciliation thus achieved enables the peace of mind and the ability to face the pain without fleeing into illusion (Galimberti U. 2009, p. 46).

There are three stages of emotional development. First comes the impulse. Through training and education it changes into emotion and later into feeling. A feeling is an emotion together with the awareness of that emotion. Those who love themselves can instantly relate to other people's feeling because they love themselves. But the young of today are stuck in the first stage – the stage of the impulse. (...) The feeling is not a biological entity, it has to be acquired. It can be learnt also by reading. By reading one learns about pain, love, despair, tragedy, grief. And when we learn about these emotions we can start recognising them in ourselves. Currently the young experience emotions which they cannot identify. If you ask them how they are feeling, the usual answer is that they are feeling bad. The emotions should be understood and identified. One should know how the emotions develop. Only by knowing what sadness is, how it develops, we will not abandon hope. But if we do not realise what is going on inside us we may drown in despair. The young are losing the ability to differentiate and describe emotions (Petrović Jesenovec B. 2009).

People are social beings, they want to enjoy beauty which is possible only in one's openness, devotion, in the moments of closeness. Everybody can enjoy fiction in which we can immerse and experience this overwhelming beauty which gives meaning to our world. Everybody yearns for the supreme, for the beauty. The external beauty helps waken our internal beauty and the art provides the ideal channel.

In several years of bibliotherapeutic work with students we have noticed important changes in their lives as well as ours. We would like to emphasize that bibliotherapy (biblioprevention) in schools is not based on connecting group members, that a book is a starting point for a conversation and that healing is enabled by different types of interactions, which are: learner-self, learner-mentor, learner-learner(s), mentor-mentor and mentor-self interaction. Therefore, they are not only book

discussion meetings, but also meetings with fellow human beings, which is of great importance as it enables and enhances students' personal growth. Not every reading or book discussion is bibliotherapy or biblioprevention. Therapy can only happen when mutual trust and a spontaneous relationship are established and one feels safe in the group. In addition, closeness and openness are needed for changes to happen.

Although experts are of the opinion that in schools only prevention, not the real bibliotherapy, can be conducted, we, on the contrary, think the therapy can occur, though it is not necessary or planned. In any case, the therapeutic role is not planned in schools and it is not aimed at an individual child (or a group of children) with a goal to conduct a therapy. The therapy occurs spontaneously in a child when certain conditions are met: a child's confidence in their mentor, easiness and acceptance of a child the way he or she is, identification with book characters, the insight, the artistic value of literature etc. In the school environment, healing and changing with the help of books occur spontaneously. A teacher (mentor) observes changes in children during conversations with them, from their responses to books they have read and through a child's own self-reflection.

The effects of biblioprevention on students can be seen in everyday school life through their communication, thoughts and acts.

A mentor helps a child feel himself/herself, his/her own physical responses to feelings and enables the child to express these feelings in a safe environment.

The author sometimes feels calmness, mildness, thankfulness and warmth after our reading club and she knows that her colleague (who helps run the club) and students have similar feelings too. This makes you imbued with positive energy, gives you the energy needed for everyday life.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Reading books to a child has intellectual, emotional and social benefits. After several years of bibliopreventive meetings the author as a mentor, has found out that:

- both in real life and during bibliopreventive classes time is needed for deepening of our ties,
- when a person trusts his/her mentor and feels emotional relief after reading a story, a spontaneous therapy starts (even though this is not our goal) since a student is able to safely express his/her emotions, reshapes them and focuses on a positive solution,
- the therapeutic role of reading is spontaneous – it can't be foreseen,
- listening to the other person is very important if we want to hear and accept him/her,
- books are a unique means for the gradual change of a child's perception of the world, relationships and oneself,
- by reading books an individual does not only grow personally, but also becomes more open and tolerant to life and people around him/her (overcoming taboos),
- beauty (aesthetics, artistry) has a healing effect on a reader, therefore it is important that quality youth literature is chosen which combines aesthetic, ethic and cognitive elements (none of the components should be more important than the other two),
- time needed for discussing different things/people/circumstances is of key importance,
- a mentor himself/herself has to experience the healing power of literature in the first place as well as have a personal/an intimate relationship with literature,
- a mentor has to avoid giving advice in a sense: "When something happens to you, do ...",
- it is not true that teenagers do not think sensitively and openly about books they have read,

- a mentor has to change himself/herself and grow personally all the time if he/she wants the same process to happen in a child,
- a mentor has to be a subtle and compassionate observer with empathic immersion in a student and a necessary distance – the process of self-reflection is significant,
- all problems have solution, especially when looked upon from a different perspective,
- the world is beautiful because it is diverse, varied (different opinions, solutions...) and we "qualify" children for life with others and for their quality life,
- a constructive conversation is an ideal means for solving a problem (conflict),
- it is perfect if a group of students is led by two mentors who can discuss problems and support each other. If a mentor is alone, it is recommended that she/he discusses the problems with her/his supervisor or a critical friend.

CONCLUSION

In the second decade of the 21st century a school librarian is a person who is aware of the consequences of his/her actions. She/he does not deny modern technology, follows trends, uses Facebook and knows what blog is. However, the school librarian is someone who is aware that advanced modern technology cannot replace a human factor – closeness, reading and storytelling. She/he is a children's confidant, their mentor, listens to them and hears them as well as shares her/his time and knowledge with them. She/he knows that children need to look into each other's eyes, tell their fears and reveal their distress. Moreover, children need to be able to talk about everything they go through.

That is why, the school librarian in the second decade of the 21st century:

- defends a classical book, opens it to students so that they reach for it,

- is aware and acts as a human – listens to students, encourages them to express their feelings and think about themselves and the world,
- recommends them quality books with a cathartic charge, which enable personal growth, “make you think”, move borders, deepen and expand horizons at the same time,
- encourages and enthuses children about the meaning of live contact and talking in person,
- leads students through books and her/his actions so that they can get into touch with themselves – leads them along the path of compassion as she/he knows that only someone who has experienced compassion and warmth can pass it on to someone else.

The world needs WARMTH and COMPASSION more than ever before.

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