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**Bibliotherapy in Inclusive Classrooms:
A Healing Touch of Books**

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Abstract:

This paper explores the simple bibliotherapeutic strategies which can be used in an inclusive classroom. The main purpose of using these bibliotherapeutic strategies is to help students have a better understanding of themselves and other students, leading them to their improved adjustment in the inclusive class. Most of these strategies can be practiced by the schoolteachers themselves, for the students with or without disabilities studying in an inclusive setup. There are also a few strategies suggested, which can be practiced by them

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under the guidance of a school psychologist or a counsellor. The students who have a disability or those who belong to any disadvantaged group may suffer from poor self-concept, low self-worth, and low self-esteem. Through these bibliotherapeutic strategies, the teachers of an inclusive classroom can create opportunities where children can express themselves, catharsis, comfort their minds, and cope up with their issues in a better way. Bibliotherapy also helps the students develop social skills and identify their strengths and self-worth. The strategies suggested in this paper, will help those students also, who do not have a disability but need to have a better understanding of their classmates with disabilities. Bibliotherapy can also support them cope with the challenges they face when they study in the same classroom with diverse peers. It also helps them cope up with their own day-to-day stresses and anxieties and to have better social and personal skill.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy, Bibliotherapeutic strategies, Inclusive classroom

Introduction:

Most of us like reading books of our choice. Though the taste of selecting books changes with time. The habit of reading books starts only by listening and watching the pictures in the storybooks. The teacher, parent, elder sibling, grandparent, or caregiver read the story from the books for their children, in an interesting manner with proper voice modulation, appropriate gestures, and body movement. They also use pictures to make the storytelling more interesting. It stimulates children's young minds and gives them the message that the words printed in a book have some story and a message which touches their mind and soul. Gradually children start reading by themselves. Reading books helps in their cognitive and

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language development, increases their concentration, and improves creativity and imagination. It also helps in children's social and emotional development.

“Child Development” the famous book by Elizabeth B. Hurlock also describes book reading as a passive play. Children are amused when they read the book of their interest. Book reading also has a healing touch on the minds of children as well as adults. When we are stressed and frustrated, reading any book or a book, selectively chosen to serve the purpose of healing body and mind, can give us a therapeutic effect on our minds. Children with special needs, sometimes feel anxious, low, tensed, confused, and frustrated when they face different challenges posed by the environment to which they belong. Reading books can have a therapeutic effect on them and help them feel peaceful and calm. Many psychologists use book reading as a therapy to prevent and heal various psychological issues.

Objectives:

1. To examine the need for bibliotherapy in an inclusive classroom
2. To explore the bibliotherapeutic strategies which can be used by the teachers in an inclusive classroom.

Review of the literature:

Research has proved that reading books can help people have a positive change in their emotions. Reading can change their attitudes and perceptions and accordingly change in their behaviour leading them to a better life. (Russell and Shrodes [1950](#)). Bibliotherapy can be performed with the students in three stages by a psychologist. The first stage is identification, the second is catharsis and the last stage is insight. (Lenkowsky and Lenkowsky [1978](#)).

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Bibliotherapy when used with children having intellectual disabilities, helped them improve their social skills and self-help skills. It also helped them change their attitude towards others, it was more respectful. They started showing interest in group activities. They were better aware of their personal feelings and more comfortable in expressing those feelings. (Mehdizadeh and Khosravi,2019)

The students facing challenging situations, when given the bibliotherapy, could relate themselves with the characters of the books and found themselves more capable of expressing themselves and changed their perspectives towards their challenges. (Rozalski, Stewart and Miller,2010)

Not only the children with disabilities but also the siblings of children with disabilities also face many challenges. They often feel disturbed and confused and find it difficult to share how they are feeling about that. They also felt better and felt more confident to speak about how they feel, when bibliotherapy was used with them as an intervention. (DeVries and Suden,2019).

The above-mentioned research shows that how bibliotherapy can be beneficial when used in special education by a trained person whether it be a psychologist or a counsellor as a specialized technique. Here it is important to mention that the present paper focuses more on the simple ways which can be used by schoolteachers in an inclusive setup.

What is Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy is the combination of two Greek words, 'Biblion' and 'therapeia'. 'Biblion' is the word associated with the book and 'therapeia' is the word associated with the process

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applied to treat various ailments. So bibliotherapy can be defined as a process of using a text, a book, or any other reading material to heal various ailments.

For a person, who is fond of reading and facing psychological issues, bibliotherapy can be a boon. Bibliotherapy is using books or texts to heal and comfort a person. When a person goes through a difficult phase of time and reading helps that person to cope with his emotions and worries, then it can be said that reading is acting like bibliotherapy to that person. Merriam-Webster says that bibliotherapy is a form of therapy in which a text, a reading material, or a book is used to help a person solve his problems and deal with his psychological conditions (www.merriam-webster.com). This therapy is so natural that when it is used with someone, that person does not even know that he is being treated with a therapy. That is why it is best to use it with children dealing with various mental health issues. Bibliotherapy also helps teachers to form desired behaviour in their students.

Nature of Inclusive Classroom:

An inclusive classroom is one in which the learners are diverse. It ensures to cater to all the special needs of the children in a regular classroom. The students with various disabilities whether these be physical or mental, study with normal ones under the same roof. Inclusive education is the best approach in preparing students for an inclusive society. When they learn together in the same classroom, they get to know each other better. They get familiar with the strengths, the weaknesses, and the needs of each other. The Inclusive approach of education copes with the diverse needs of all learners by decreasing the barriers inside schools and classrooms. There may be two types of inclusive classrooms. In one classroom students with disabilities have partial inclusion and in the other, they get full inclusion. In partial inclusion,

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students with a disability sit in a regular class for most of the time, and for the rest of the time, they are in the resource room with the special teacher to get the education. In full inclusion, the students with disabilities get all the required special services in the regular classroom and stay there for the full day.

Inclusive education not only deals with the education of children with special needs dealing with any physical- motor, behavioral-emotional, intellectual- developmental and sensory impairment, It also deals with that abled group of children in the regular classroom which belongs to the disadvantaged group of the society like the children who are engaged in child labor, belongs to secluded or remote areas, are from the family of a migrant laborer, facing abuse at home, and girl child living under unfavorable conditions. These children may confront emotions they find difficult to speak about, or which can confuse and upset them. So due to this diverse nature of the inclusive class, the teachers need to follow a specially designed program of education combined with emotional and social support to them.

They first need to reduce the stigma generally people have towards persons with disabilities or belonging to disadvantaged groups. As discussed above, students belonging to these groups may face various social-emotional and behavioral issues. They may suffer from poor self-concept, low self-worth, and low self-esteem. Teachers working in an inclusive classroom, need to help children cope up with these issues by helping them comfort their minds and by providing them a congenial environment and opportunities to express, catharsis, develop social skills and identify their strengths and self-worth.

The teachers, in an inclusive classroom use differentiated instruction in small groups, seek parental support, invite the specialists in the classroom as per requirement, like speech

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therapist, reading specialist etc. They also encourage collaborative learning between the students with and without disabilities.

Need of Bibliotherapy in an inclusive classroom:

- **Bibliotherapy as a diagnostic tool:** Students belonging to disadvantaged or disability groups may have some emotional and psychological issues and they may find it difficult to speak about those issues. Here the bibliotherapy can help the teachers. While reading the books, which character they associate with themselves, or their feelings, tells us more about those students. How they reflect on the content or how they respond to the open-ended questions, gives the idea to the teacher or psychologist about what kind of challenges they are going through and what is their mental state. In this way, bibliotherapy can act as a diagnostic tool to understand what the students belonging to the disadvantaged or disability category are struggling with and how they feel about that.
- **Bibliotherapy as a healing tool:** When students are given the chance to read the books of their interest, they feel good. The books with colours and beautiful pictures attract their minds and give them pleasure. It reduces their stress. Reading, being a cognitive activity, stimulates the minds of the readers and prevents memory loss. It enhances their academic performance, social and personal development skills. Reading also enhances their imagination. They develop a better understanding of themselves and others. Reading helps them learn new things about the world around them, develops new ideas and behaviours. They develop more compassion and empathy for others. (MHFA, 2018) Reading helps them catharsis their negative

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emotions. Reading heals their aching minds. If used by trained teachers or psychologists systematically, its therapeutic effect is more than it is used as a general regular reading. In special cases, bibliotherapy can be a part of a student's IEP (individualized educational plan).

Bibliotherapeutic strategies for an inclusive classroom:

A classroom, inclusive in nature, does not only include children with special needs, physically but also has a design of a special program of learning for them which suits their special needs. Students when read books and identify themselves with the characters, learn the ways how the characters deal with specific situations and cope up with specific emotions. A few simple bibliotherapeutic strategies are suggested here which can be used by the teachers in an inclusive class.

- **Three stages of bibliotherapy:** Bibliotherapy, in schools, can be as natural and spontaneous as general reading practice in the class. If required, a specific plan of bibliotherapy can be executed with the help of a psychologist. It is generally planned in three stages. The first stage is the identification when during reading, the student identifies himself with the characters of the literature or a story and tries to make sense of his problems and finds himself capable to solve his problems with more confidence. The second stage is the catharsis stage when he associates his feelings with the characters' emotions and feelings, He looks at the way the character deals with the emotional issue. The student finds the opportunity to catharsis and feels that he can deal with his emotional issues. The third stage is the insight stage when the student gets insights that just like the character, it would not be difficult for him too,

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to find the solutions for his problems. (Lenkowsky and Lenkowsky [1978](#)). Although bibliotherapy is a complex task that is to be done skilfully by the teacher or a psychologist, still it can be practiced and learned through training.

- **Variety of books:** In a diverse nature of class students learn to read at different rates. They may have different reading level and their own interest in the genre. Keeping this in mind there should be a variety in the books, provided to the children studying in an inclusive classroom. The books should have colourful cover page and pictures which attracts children's attention and interest. It is important that books selected for students should have quality literature. The books should be placed in such a manner that all children have approach and access to them. The books should be in a simple language that can easily be read and understood by the children. There should be books with big fonts or in braille for low vision or visually impaired students. Speaking books or audiobooks should also be available. Technology can also be used to access reading materials. Teachers can also read the material for students for those who are unable to read themselves.
- **Variety of reading tools:** A variety of supporting tools should be available to be used by the children while reading. To locate the page, where you stopped reading, highlight the main ideas, and write some notes, students should be provided with colourful pens, markers, highlighter, and beautiful bookmarkers.
- **Sharing of books and ideas:** Students should be encouraged to share the books with their peers. They should also be encouraged to share their ideas about what they read and what they understand about that. Teachers can also design a group reading activity in which students can read and reflect in a small group.

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- **Open-ended questions to help them reflect:** Students can be asked a few open-ended questions after reading a book to help them reflect on what they read. They can be asked to write any five things they liked the most or disliked the most in the book. They can be asked to mention any one character they liked or disliked the most. Also ask them to give the reason for their answer. After the reading of a story, they can be asked to mention, what do they think about the end of the story? Should it be the way it is, or it should be different, if yes how should it be in their opinion, etc.
- **Encouragement to read:** Teachers need to encourage the students to read what and how they want. The children should be given proper time and a peaceful place to sit and read the books of their choice or which is provided to them by the teacher or psychologist with some specific purpose.
- **Impressive way of reading:** Sometimes when teachers need to read the stories or some reading material for the students due to their limitation of any kind, they should read it with appropriate voice modulation, facial gestures, and body movement. This supports teachers in getting children's attention and interest, helps children get the meaning of the content. It also helps children identify themselves with the characters of the reading materials and with their feelings and emotions as well.
- **Promoting silent reading:** Silent reading is a skill that lets the reader read voicelessly Teachers should encourage silent reading in the classroom because for the therapeutic effect teachers are expected to let the students understand what they read and identify themselves with the characters. It is possible only when they are allowed to read silently. Here, it is important to note that in bibliotherapy the purpose of the

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reading is not at all to assess the children for their language reading skills, though by reading, these skills also improve.

- **Post-reading activities:** Post reading activities play a very important role in bibliotherapy. After the reading, some activities can be planned like discussions or report writing. They can also be encouraged to express their views and understanding through arts or dramatization. This enhances their creativity, reflective and communicative skills as well as social skills. This will also help them understand and accept each other in a better way.
- **Conclusion:** Books and stories touch our body mind and soul. Its alleviating effects on our minds have been well proven by researchers. Since childhood, books and stories are being read by us to amuse ourselves and to learn new things. The diverse nature of the inclusive classroom sometimes perplexes the students and the teachers as well. Those bibliotherapeutic strategies which can easily be used by the teachers in their inclusive classroom can be a tool in their hands to get to know better about their students' challenges, their emotions, and how they can be helped to cope with those challenges effectively. In a few of the cases where more structured and specialized bibliotherapy is required, the teachers can take the help of the school psychologist or the counsellor.

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