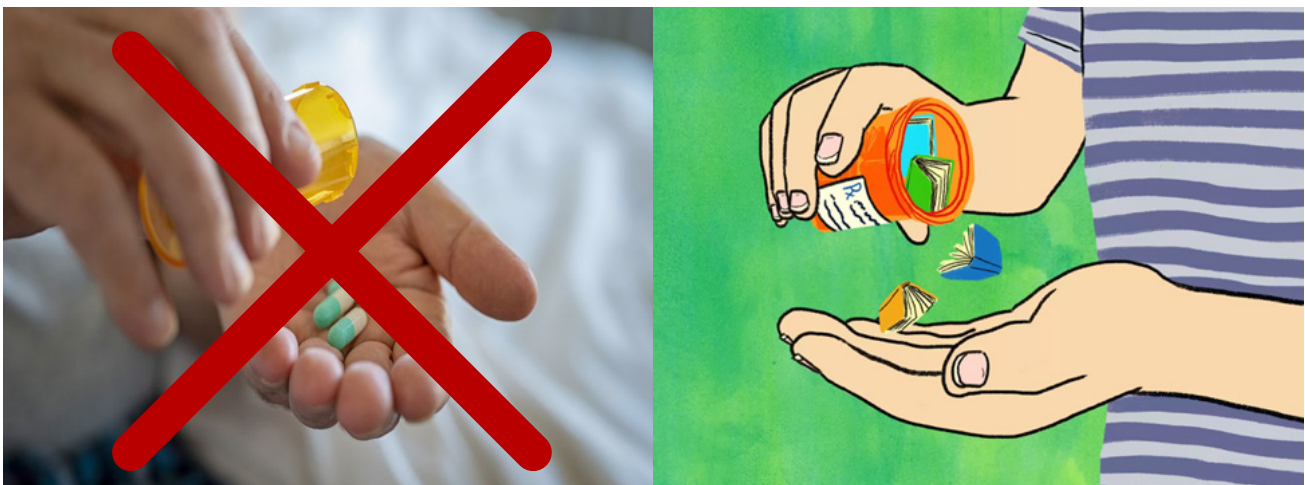


BIBLIOTHERAPY IN PRACTICE: INITIATED A NEW SERVICE AT THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF SRI LANKA



University education creates a transition period from school education to the real world through the provision of professional knowledge, soft skills, and different experiences. Students learn to deal with challenges, overcome conflicts, adapt to new environments, and cope with stress in university life, not only in engaging academic fields. Students face different problems in this new environment for these reasons. University counselors provide solid mental support with various tools to prepare them for higher-level challenges in the future. Bibliotherapy is a popular tool for them, although it is not widely used in the context of Sri Lanka yet. This service was initiated at the University of Moratuwa Library in Sri Lanka, where the researcher has been practicing bibliotherapy as a counselor for years. This work presents a new approach, which is very important in university libraries, dependent not just on traditional services, but on serving users. This article aims at sharing the researcher's experience with other professionals and motivating them towards it.

Bibliotherapy is a therapeutic tool in counseling that is used to cure patients. "Bibliotherapy is the use of a set of selected readings as therapeutic

tools in medicine and psychiatry; and a way to solve personal problems through directed reading" [1]. It helps heal people's mental illnesses through reading materials carefully selected by a bibliotherapist. The healing process is conducted through reading, writing, drawing, activities on post-reading discussion, or activities designed by a bibliotherapist. It may include one or a combination of these methods. Bibliotherapy has been identified as a healing technique for different mental problems.

Today, educational institutions have given their attention to establish bibliotherapeutic centers. Universities have enough resources and appropriate environments for that. University Libraries are a resourceful space in this regard. The university libraries have many reading materials (printed and electronic), a larger space, a conducive atmosphere, and nice people. These qualities help provide better service to their clients. The library of the University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka has initiated this valuable service for years through a counselor and had the opportunity to bring fruitful results to students. This is the first time in a Sri Lankan university, and this should be extended to other universities in Sri Lan-

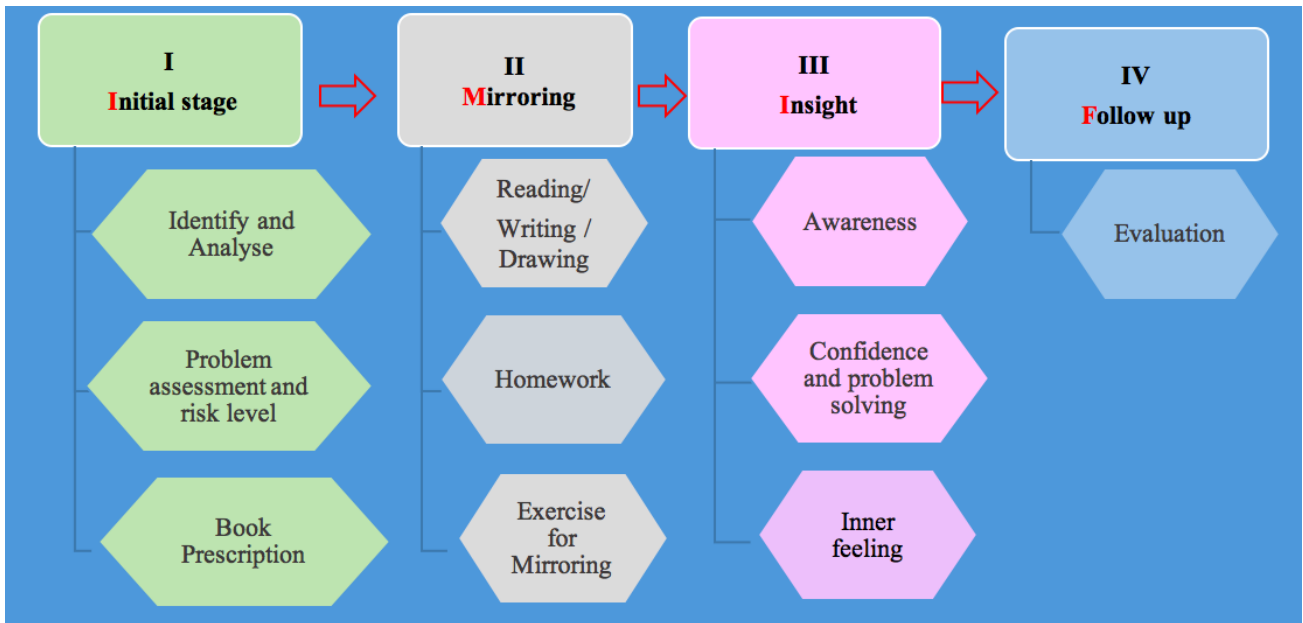


Figure 1: IMIF Model in Bibliotherapy (Created by D.N.T.Gunawardhana)

ka. Some Sri Lankan researchers have discussed the importance of initiating bibliotherapy in Sri Lankan universities [2, 3, 4]. However, it has not been initiated so far, and there is a readiness to do so in the future. In this regard, skilled human resources are more essential than physical resources. The results of this study will greatly contribute to sharing the researcher's experience in bibliotherapy and show directions on how to practice counseling.

Bibliotherapy can mainly be divided into two; clinical bibliotherapy and developmental bibliotherapy. Doctors and mental health professionals conduct clinical bibliotherapy for emotional and behavioral problems. Counselors conduct developmental bibliotherapy for different counseling matters. The bibliotherapy process could be divided into three stages; identification, mirroring, and insight. According to how we conduct it, bibliotherapy takes different forms; self-help bibliotherapy, creative bibliotherapy, informal bibliotherapy, and formal bibliotherapy. Counselors use Creative Bibliotherapy according to their creative skills. It may be some exercises on storytelling and role-playing, drawing a picture/ drawing a story, imagining their life events, rewriting their life events, etc.

The first step is to identify the needs of the client. Bibliotherapists select the appropriate materials

carefully. Then tasks are created to start the mirroring process. After designing the motivational tasks, follow-up activities commence.

The following tasks are carried out when students come to the counseling session. The first session is an initial discussion, and it is based on analyzing the issue. After assessing the problem, a book prescription is given. Book prescriptions may include different resources (printed or online), fiction, nonfiction, poetry, translations, audiobooks, and audio-visual books. When she or he has several urgent requirements, they are identified according to the given priority. When they are at a higher risk level, bibliotherapy is not a good practice, and they are immediately referred to psychiatrists/medical professionals. Bibliotherapy helps people who are at a moderate or low-risk level. After identifying the situation, the Mirroring process starts. Clients can develop their skills through reading, writing, drawing and role-playing exercises. Counselors create many opportunities using creative bibliotherapy at this stage. Giving awareness, making them confident, improving problem-solving skills, and bringing their inner voice are done in the third stage. The final stage is follow-up. The evaluation process starts at this stage. Sometimes clients go back to the mirroring process or the insight stage. Sometimes, this process works as a circle.

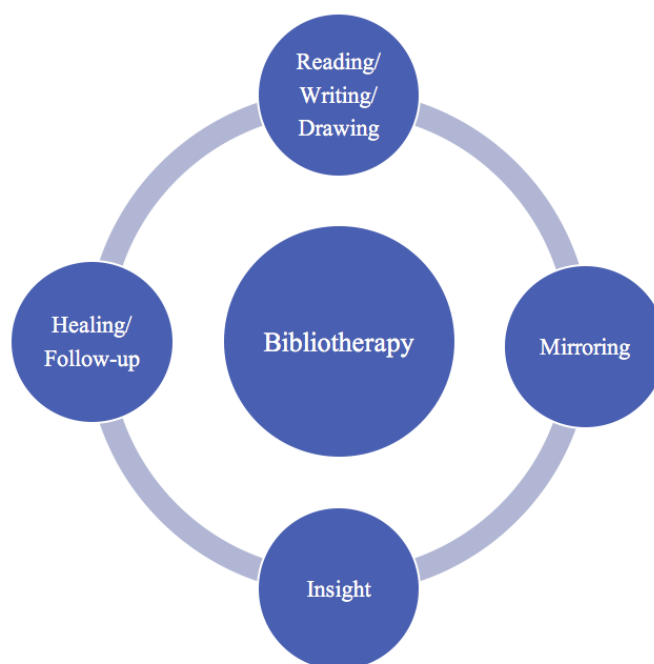


Figure 2: Bibliotherapy process (Created by D.N.T.Gunawardhana)

Bibliotherapy help “cope with diagnosis and treatment. This is especially true with conditions like cancer, which have a significant emotional impact on patients and their families” [5]. Bibliotherapy has healing power when it is conducted through proper ‘book prescription’. It is a list of appropriately recommended and carefully selected books (printed or electronic) by a bibliotherapist or a counselor. Prescriptions depend on many factors. They are the nature of the matter, the stage they are passing/risk level, age, literacy, patient interest in reading areas, their reading pattern, behavior, and others.

What's next?

It is essential to introduce this technique to other universities in Sri Lanka. There is a readiness to develop it in some universities, and they need proper training to start this service. Bibliotherapeutic units or centers need to be built there. University libraries or counseling centers are potential places for this. There are no ‘books on prescription’ list in Sri Lanka. It is necessary to build a list with the guidance and support of medical professionals. Ongoing research aims at building a ‘book prescription list’ with the help of other professionals.

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