

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF BIBLIOTHERAPY'S APPROACH IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM USING PROJECT METHOD

Preventive program in the public educational system, trauma
prevention focusing on women

Thesis Book

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Theory

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„The fairytale is about us but we cannot get to our target without literature.” (interview excerpts)

„You cannot say to yourself the word, which helps you and brings you joy.” (Ethiopian saying)

1. Scientific objective and structure of the dissertation

This thesis aims to develop a project that is focused on gender and human dignity, which has further opportunities within the educational system of elementary schools. The project aims to process problems of society - mostly during Hungarian language classes – and its nature is preventive. The thesis focuses on theories and questions of the Pedagogy of Feminism and Educational Science, approaches mostly contemporary art and literature. The feminist theoretical framework does not only refer to the female point of view or the female interpretation, as several point of views can and could prevail. However, the female point of view and the female interpretation are most probably not part of the current literature education. This thesis highlights many social issues, these could serve as topics for the Hungarian Language classes. The dissertation’s main focus is the prevention of trauma, domestic violence and violence against women. The choice of topic justifies the examination of textbooks and study materials from a female perspective. This dissertation analyses two textbook packages - which are pioneering in their genre – and the educational framework B in force at the time of writing the dissertation. Based on predetermined aspects this thesis seeks to answer the following question: Whether women’s experience and women at all are included on the pages of textbooks?

The project method mentioned in the title is included in the development and usage of the module. One of the aims of Feminist Pedagogy is that the collective knowledge should be constructed during the learning process, the project method offers a new way and tools for this. The project introduced throughout this thesis is developed, tested, and could be used in literature, grammar, history, IT and statistic classes. Moreover, a conference is created with the cooperation of pupils and teachers.

The module developed was also tested in practice, an elementary school was the environment for the test. The action research method was chosen to plan joint work and to evaluate the results. Moreover, the action research method fits well with the project method and with the feminist educational science’s main characters. The analysis focuses on the finished materials,

the experience of the students and teachers. Based on these experiences the modification and reorganization of the original lesson plans were possible.

Bibliotherapy's approach offers a solution for creating a dialogue between literature and students. Hungarian Literature classes could help developing self-knowledge, empathy and could provide a strong basis for the development of communities. As prominent players in the educational process, the experiences and attitudes of teachers are determinative when it comes to the spread of preventive literature lessons with the approach of bibliotherapy. The analysis of teachers' interviews - both elementary school teachers and university teachers - presents these attitudes and experiences. This thesis investigates the opportunities of bibliotherapy in education with the examination of teachers, students, and textbooks. In the 7th and 8th chapter the theoretical background of bibliotherapy is introduced. Moreover, the connection between bibliotherapy, narrative psychology and the mechanism of literature' effect are introduced. In the 9th chapter symptoms of trauma and the definition of psychology are introduced. Moreover, the elements are introduced that can provide an opportunity for the bibliotherapy's toolbox of trauma prevention.

In the 14th and 16th chapter two textbook packages are investigated, especially the view of women, women, and the presence of women's experience. In the 17th chapter, as an extension of the developed projects important social issues are introduced through the lens of bibliotherapy, with the aim of processing them. In the 18th chapter the final module with the plans for each lesson and methodological guide are presented. In the 19th chapter one completed project is presented and its experiences are summarized.

2. Theses and outcomes

The aim of the research is to understand how trauma, as a topic and problem can be placed in the elementary educational system. Elementary school education does not concentrate enough on important social issues, such as processing trauma, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and abusive relationships. This research is looking for answers regarding the following questions: How could these topics join to the existing educational system? What methods should be used? So these topics could be integrated into lessons and school life. Sexual education, awareness and integrity of body are important issues, which no school could withdraw itself from. Raising awareness is important, as every professional who is working with children and

even parents are responsible when it comes to informing children. Moreover, professionals working with children as well as parents need to know the concepts concerning the topic. Large percentage of sexual abuse happens domestically or somebody who is close to the family happens to be the abuser. Even though this topic is very heavy, professionals - teachers, psychologists - need to recognize the symptoms, so they could create a trustful atmosphere where children can open up. These professionals also need to guide these students, so they would understand the possibilities and could take the next steps. The module developed initiates to inform students and teachers and aims to provide help, so these very sensitive social issues are solved within the elementary school system, not swept under the rug anymore. Symptoms of sexual abuse and the awareness of these symptoms on both sides – teachers and students – could contribute greatly to prevention. This topic is very sensitive and also difficult to handle, especially within the framework of education, thus an appropriate approach is necessary. The literature selected focuses on abuse against women and raises awareness of oppression of women.

This dissertation is placed at the intersection of literature, psychology, and educational science. Through education with the help of literature this project aims to create positive psychological changes for students.

This thesis focuses on whether public education is an appropriate field for trauma prevention, and if so which methods and which theoretical background works best. Does the community, school, and class have a role in processing/preventing trauma? The role of teachers in this context is unique, as they are the ones spending a lot of time with the students. Some of these students could be traumatized. The question arises: Does trauma have signs that are recognizable for teachers? So teachers with the help of school psychologist or other professional could support the student. The preventive programme mostly could be planned at the elementary school level, however this thesis digresses trauma of younger children, as teachers can also encounter traces and symptoms of previous events. The hypothesis of this thesis states that symptoms of trauma can be recognized by teachers, thus students can be referred to a professional.

This thesis also investigates how school displays gender roles, experience of women and whether textbooks for elementary schools are supporting this process or not? What kind of stereotypes are displayed regarding women and men? How the relationship between the two

genders is presented? This dissertation analyses two Hungarian literature textbook packages, which are groundbreaking because the focus is on the own experience of individuals and the texts are placed in a wider context. Based on the hypothesis of this thesis – supporting with the own experience of the author and researches – women are represented in textbooks in small numbers. Stereotypes of gender are heavily presented in the educational system and no textbook reflects on the lack of women's presence.

Besides textbooks the educational process' most important players are the teachers. The appearance of a new therapy and approach in public education must mean some preparation, as teachers need tools to be able to work with this new method. This thesis investigates how teachers think about this method and how will it be implemented in their praxis? If it appears in their praxis, how would it determine their attitudes and methods? Do teachers think its possible to implement bibliotherapy's approach within the public educational framework? What happens at a class where own experiences are the centre of focus? How are teachers involved and how are students involved? How the opinion of university teachers and elementary school teachers differentiate?

Based on the hypothesis elementary school teachers are more overwhelmed than university teachers because of shortage of time and curricular pressure. Thus, bibliotherapy's approach is less presented at classes. Moreover, canon and obligatory literature are more important, as it is already part of the educational process.

The hypothesis of this dissertation states that textbooks and courses only integrate authors, who happen to be women in small numbers. Therefore, the experience of women are not represented widely and even the lack of women's experience are not reflected on. There were two textbook packages investigated, which partially fulfilled these expectations. None of these textbooks had more than 15% of women authors, the side of women (including or lacking authors, interpretation of actors' attitudes, somewhat schematic characterization of women) are portrayed roughly, its absence is not reflected on. In fact, the small number of women authors should not be blamed on the textbooks – nor for socio-historical reason -, but the reflection on the lack could be an appropriate tool to eliminate the lack of female experience. Self-reflections and tasks that help forming opinions can also include the experiences of female students in the learning process.

Four teachers gave interviews, who work with the bibliotherapy's approach. Based on the interviews it can be stated that their attitudes determine their teaching/learning processes and it also appears in their activity. Problems differentiate, as in elementary school students already feel like the subject is overwhelming, in many cases students lack time and there is no opportunity to choose texts as they wish. The classes are too big, thus there is no opportunity for each students to speak during class. University teachers' opportunities are more flexible, they work with smaller classes and they can more freely choose texts for class. At this level confounding roles could lead to problems. Students share inner content of themselves and teachers think sometimes these contents are too deep. It is hard to separate the role of a teacher from a therapist and these teachers are just trying to help but they are not therapists. Thus, it is important to designate the borders, which protect the student and the teacher as well. Based on the interviews with elementary school teachers, it can be stated that the subject - Hungarian literature classes - should be liberated from all the expectations and enormous amount of materials. Students could work better together in small groups and it would offer more freedom with the texts. One of the positive aspects of university classes is that teachers have more freedom when it comes to choosing texts. Therefore, elementary school would need to offer more space and freedom to teachers. The hypothesis regarding teachers states that trauma has signs/symptoms, which could be clearly recognized. These symptoms could be recognized by teachers based on students' behaviour. The literature review to create this thesis says otherwise, it states that clearly identifiable symptoms do not exist. However, there are such signs, which might not be because of trauma, still could detect serious conditions. Obviously, teachers do not need to diagnose students but they could indicate the problem. As they spend a lot of time with students they could work together with the school psychologist and initiate referring students to the suitable professional. This theory would work in an ideal and well-functioning system and this way the school could have an effect on a social issue. The experience of students are presented through reflections, reports, and private conversations. The module was created based on their opinions, views, and the difficulties experienced on classes.

The project and school experiences demonstrate that tools such as, art therapy, drawing, painting, creating, and discussion can produce an atmosphere, where even unmotivated students who are dependent on the teachers' guidance can be liberated. These students are not used to say their own opinion in this formal environment. However, during the work together and with the help of the conference it became easier for them to say what they think.