

**'Everyone according to their talents'**

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A long time ago, in a far distant school system, a group of talented students received special attention.

Imagine, if you will, students grouped on their exceptionally talented performance. These students, sons and daughters of taxpayers, received special equipment, treatment and specially trained teachers to help nurture their precocious talents. This special group even got to go on field trips.

Since we don't want to encourage a culture of underachievement, these students' skills are stretched to the limit with after-school events. The performances of this special group are proudly attended even by nonrelatives. All is well. It is a win-win situation. The students get to build their self-esteem by building their skills, and the school gets to show off its best students, demonstrating what a great school these students attend. On the horizon, however, is a well-meaning group of people who feel their children are being shortchanged. For whatever reason, these children were not "tapped on the shoulder" to be in the program described above.

To equalize things, it is felt the special equipment, treatment, trips and specially trained teachers should be spread out for all children, regardless of need. Now all children can get a little more attention in developing their skills. Everyone will perform better, not based on need but on the even per-pupil expenditure of resources.

Well, in the name of fairness, there goes the varsity basketball team (those students who get special equipment, treatment, trips and specially trained teachers). Now everyone will shoot baskets a little better, dribble a little faster.

No student-athlete will be left behind, but then no potential varsity athlete will get ahead, either.

Now apply this logic to another high-performing group of children, the advanced learner program.

Watering down a program to raise the overall tide of performance of everyone sounds democratic. But the most undemocratic education is when "everyone" is treated absolutely equally, regardless of needs. Some children will be "left behind" because they wouldn't get the support they need to finish the race. Some children, with the need to speed ahead (learn more), would not be allowed to get too far ahead, because they may get out of our reach and

may raise the bar of performance for those who like the comfort of underachieving.

No child left behind does not mean let no child get ahead. There's a wise old saying, "Everyone according to their talents."

Let's give all kids a chance to feel the thrill of success during their academic career.

### **How Does it Feel to be in "The Flow"?**

(by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, ' "Flow" and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi' from website: <http://www.austega.com/gifted/articles/flow.htm> )

1. Completely involved, focused, concentrating - with this either due to innate curiosity or as the result of training
2. Sense of ecstasy - of being outside everyday reality
3. Great inner clarity - knowing what needs to be done and how well it is going
4. Knowing the activity is doable - that the skills are adequate, and neither anxious or bored
5. Sense of serenity - no worries about self, feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of ego - afterwards feeling of transcending ego in ways not thought possible
6. Timeliness - thoroughly focused on present, don't notice time passing
7. Intrinsic motivation - whatever produces "flow" becomes its own reward

### **Using Books to Heal and Enthuse Gifted Students**

By Lauren Martin

*Alexander's day was terrible. It was horrible. Overall it was no good, and very bad. He woke up with bubble gum in his hair, missed out on the toy in the cereal box, and had to go to the dentist as well as go shopping! Alexander believed that because Australia was down under, a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day would turn into a wonderful, terrific, really good day if he were there. There are so many other things that happened during that day which made Alexander positive Australia would be the best place to be!*

Synopsis of the children's picture book *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day* by Judith Viorst, adapted from summary at <http://kennedy-center.org/programs/family/alexander/intro.html> - 8/10/01.

CHILDREN FACE many situations in their lives and often have trouble coping. They can feel isolated; that they are the only person who has ever felt this way. Books have traditionally been used to heal readers through narrative, and can be dated back to the time of Thebes - The Theban Library bore an inscription across its portal: 'The Healing Place of the Soul' (Byrne at <http://www.tased.edu.au/tasonline/tag/aaegt7/byrne.htm> on 6/10/01). Using books to deal with problems or issues is one way to help children cope with situations at hand (Rizza, M; 1997).

**Bibliotherapy** involves guided reading and is the use of literature to help people solve problems. *'It is (part of) a family of technique for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant based on mutual sharing of literature'* (Pardeck, 1989, cited in Alex at

[http://www.indiana.edu/~eric\\_rec/ieo/digests/d82.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/digests/d82.html) on 8/10/01).

Hébert (1991) cautions that the simple act of reading a story is not bibliotherapy (cited in Rizza, 1997). Bibliotherapy begins the discussion process by giving the child someone or something to identify with, to reiterate that there is hope and a way out of the situation, and that others have felt the way you do now. By using this technique, children learn the processes of problem solving which will help them with their own crises.

Bibliotherapy can be used for children who are suffering emotionally, such as with family problems or break-ups, death of a loved one (human or animal), or moving house. This is a form of developmental bibliotherapy. Other uses for bibliotherapy include to encourage interests outside of one's self, to relieve pressure – mental and emotional, to emphasize that others feel the way they do, to offer diverse solutions to a problem, to encourage attitudinal / behavioural change, and to reduce fear. Bibliotherapy is also one activity used with gifted and talented students when they are faced with troubles because of their ability.

(*'Bibliotherapy'*, cited in Alex at

[http://www.indiana.edu/~eric\\_rec/ieo/digests/d82.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/digests/d82.html) on 6/10/01; Byrne at

<http://www.tased.edu.au/tasonline/tag/aaegt7/byrne.htm> on 6/10/01).

Particularly for gifted and talented students, bibliotherapy is used to promote further thought, and to challenge students when reading literature to use higher-order thinking skills via the implementation of thought-provoking questions and activities. Examples of these are provided further on in this article. Because of the high level of ability that gifted and talented students possess, bibliotherapy gives these students a challenge to not only help the character/s of the book solve their problems, and thus solve their own, but to use empathy to relate to the character/s.

Ways in which bibliotherapy techniques are administered can vary. Group or individual sessions can be used, although in an individual situation people feel less inhibited and tend to speak up more. Group work in the classroom, however, can be integrated into many areas so that it does not seem to be specifically related to one child. For example, a teacher may use a book such as *Jane and the dragon* by M. Baynton for a boy who wants to play with girls at school. This does not specifically relate to the child, but allows the children to see that if Jane wants to be a knight, being a girl shouldn't be a reason for her not to. With this, the teacher can use the book for research on knights or dragons, and can devise literacy-based activities to ensure reading the book has more than its bibliotherapy purpose.

Byrne (at <http://www.tased.edu.au/tasonline/tag/aaegt7/byrne.htm> on 6/10/01) outlines the use of bibliotherapy in a councillor-client relationship, but this could apply to a parent-child or teacher-student relationship. The author highlights the importance of the councillor having the knowledge of the literature to be used to ensure it is appropriate to the situation and the age and developmental level of

the person, and, especially if bibliotherapy is being used on a person individually, knowledge of the psychological, physical and emotional status of the client are vital. Next, Byrne stresses the importance of trust in the client-councillor relationship so that the client feels safe in revealing their feelings, which will occur through the chosen literature.

Following on from Byrne, Halsted (1990) emphasises that for bibliotherapy to be effective, the leader of the session (i.e. the teacher, parent or councillor) must be informed about the three-part process the reader will participate in (with the guidance of the leader) through the use of bibliotherapy. The first section, *identification*, is where the reader is able to associate with a character in the book (usually the main character) and their situation. *Catharsis*, step two, is where the reader begins experiencing the emotions attributed to the character and empathising with the character. Part three, *insight*, involves the reader applying what they have learnt about the character and the way they handled the situation to their own real-life experience. Lastly, to confirm this process, the leader will pose questions to the reader/s that help them to speak about the situation and will verify their understanding (Halsted, 1990).

The choice of books to be used in bibliotherapy is imperative. The stories need to have diverse characters and creative answers to realistic problems. Children need to engage in the story to enable any success from its use. It is important that the parent, teacher or councillor reads the book before giving it to the child so that the story is relevant to their problem, so that appropriate questions are devised to initiate conversation, and that, particularly in a classroom situation for gifted and talented students, activities are devised to encourage the use of higher order thinking skills.

One such example is *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day* by Judith Viorst; this book could be used with younger, able readers. The synopsis at the start of the article highlights that nothing in Alexander's day would go right. However, Alexander is later consoled after he realises that other people have bad days too. This book could be used for children who believe that everyone is against them, for 'middle child' syndrome and such.

Although bibliotherapy is used primarily with children to help them solve problems, it can be used in another way for gifted children. An example of this is using the book '*Wombat Stew*' by M. Vaughn. This is a book in which gifted and talented readers can use analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills to complete activities accompanying the story. An example of this is using evaluation to prepare a trial for the dingo from both the defence and prosecution sides for his crime of assault against the wombat (Knight & Bailey, 1997, page 117). Activities such as this encourage higher-order thinking skills and influence the reader such that they want to become more involved in the book and reading more deeply into it.

Other ways to challenge and encourage gifted readers are outlined by Knight & Bailey (1997, page 115 - 117). Activities such as looking for hidden meanings in books, making justifications for character's decisions and identifying and analysing patterns in text are some good follow-on activities for bibliotherapy books. Using short-term and long-term projects is another method to engage

students in topics they have an interest in, and are useful in introducing new areas or follow on activities for themes introduced in bibliotherapy books. They give students a focus for their energy, and can be used in a classroom of mixed ability without specifically targeting mainstream or gifted and talented students by slightly adjusting questions for students.

The use of bibliotherapy is an important technique to help children express their feelings and resolve situations. It is also a good way to develop the minds of gifted readers through the use of thought-provoking questions, as well as expand their analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills. Using books with literacy merit that have characters and storylines developmentally appropriate to the students is vital, as is the understanding of the bibliotherapy process. Helping students realise that others have felt the way they do, and that there are solutions to their problems, is the main focus of bibliotherapy. Using books to discuss fictional situations, rather than confronting the child on their specific feelings, will allow students to reduce the feeling of inhibition when broaching personal subjects.

### **Finding a School for a Gifted Child**

(source unknown)

When gifted students apply to a private, elementary, secondary school or university, it is worthwhile finding out about what will be there for them. Here are some questions that may be asked:

- Does the school you want to attend have a specific policy on gifted and talented education? Is it available to read? Get a copy.
- How are students identified as gifted and talented? Different boards of education will have different methods. If a child has been identified by a school board, will he/she be accepted automatically or will there be retesting?
- Upon identification, what provisions are put into place to meet special educational needs? What courses does the school focus on to differentiate for gifted students – math, science, English, etc. Are there any special courses available to gifted students only?
- At what level, or when, does identification and provision of service begin - what grade, what time of the year, for how many years?
- To what degree are parents, and even children, consulted and involved in decision-making regarding gifted and talented programs? Are there special meetings held?
- What training do facilitators have that qualifies them to teach gifted students? What specialists will there be available for consultation?
- When, where and how will meetings be held with facilitators? What happens at meetings? What resources are available to them?
- How many gifted students are in the school presently and how many are expected to enter next year? It might indicate the degree to which the school values gifted students, suggest the kind of neighbourhood the school is in, or perhaps suggest the school has other priorities.

**We destroy the love of learning in children, which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for petty rewards-- gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or A's on report cards, or honor rolls, or dean's lists or Phi Beta Kappa keys--in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else.**  
**--John Holt**