

Poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic intervention in the context of researches of the Institute of Special Pedagogical Studies, Faculty of Education, Palacky University in Olomouc (Czech Republic)

(overview essay)

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Abstract: *The paper deals with realized researches focused on the field of poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic intervention, which took place in the first and second decade of the 21st century at the Institute of Special Pedagogical Studies Faculty of Education (PdFUP) in Olomouc. These studies focused on assessing the effectiveness of poetotherapy intervention in children with special needs education (SEN) and the respondents of the detoxification unit and were described in practical parts of Bachelor's and Diploma Theses of the students of the USS PdFUP. The authors of this paper allow readers to gain insight into the details of these professional works and provide not only an overview of these surveys, but also provide the candidates with the opportunity to compare the content of the subject under consideration and to assess the effectiveness of the methodologies used. At the end of this paper, the authors also contemplate other possibilities for further, possibly similar, research.*

Keywords: *Poetotherapeutic intervention, bibliotherapeutic intervention, special needs education, special pedagogical studies*

1 Introduction

Poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic intervention, understood in terms of professionally and intentionally performed therapeutic activity, is still relatively little described phenomenon and its effects, advantages and disadvantages, indications and contraindications, setting and use of individual techniques and other details are not yet known to the wider and professional public and are not yet significantly elaborated. The main purpose of this paper was to find and organize all the researches

conducted so far to assess the effects of actively presented poetry and prose, whether they were active or only perceptual techniques. The aim of the bachelor and diploma theses described below was also to compare the effects of poetotherapeutic intervention in children with SEN, in adolescents and adult clients of addiction treatment facilities and in intact groups of the Czech population. Some works also dealt with comparing the effects of prosaic and poetic texts and comparing the effectiveness of various active and passive intervention techniques.

2 Beginning of the researches

The first survey conducted at the Institute of Special Pedagogical Studies of the Faculty of Education in Olomouc, which also marginally concerned poetotherapy, was a research aimed at assessing the preferences of children of special schools (now practical and special primary schools) in the presentation of poetic and prosaic text. The author of the research, D. Flassigová, presented two examples of spells in front of children. The first one was composed of sound-painting words that rhymed and formed rhythmic stanzas. The second spell was made up of the same sounds, but the rhythm and sound-images were disturbed. The task for the children was to recognize which of the spells brings good and which brings evil. In the second part of the experiment, short stories were presented to children. The first one was rhymed and the second one was not rhymed. After listening to them, the children should immediately write on a piece of paper which of them they liked.

The author worked with a relatively large sample of children ($N = 77$), which she divided into four age groups (8–10, 11–12, 13–14, 15–16 years). The results of the survey were then evaluated separately in each group. In the overall assessment of the differences in preferences, the logical analysis of the data did not show any significant disproportion. Significant differences appeared only in more detailed assessment of results in the context of the monitored age categories.

Above all, the author's assumption that children of younger school age accept better versed verb formations has not been confirmed. The author tried to explain this result by methodological inaccuracies. However, she also considered the possibility of disturbing effects of rhymes and sound painting on the storyline. However, the order of the stories and spells presented and the fatigue factor of children could also play a role. However, the older group of children confirmed the assumption that the popularity of rhymed verbal formations decreases with the increasing age of children (groups 13–14, 15–16 years), (Flassigová, 2005).

The following part of the investigation was focused on monitoring the differences in perception of rhymed and non-rhymed prose verbal formations between girls and boys. It has not been confirmed that girls are more sensitive and receptive to versed formations and that they accept them more positively than boys. After evaluating all

the data obtained, the researcher concluded that “the perception of poetry in children (and probably also in adults) cannot be compared to their general sensitivity (Flassigová, 2005, p. 34).

3 Ongoing researches

Further research did not wait long. In 2008 P. Froncová, a student of the SSSS PdFUP, described in her bachelor thesis some used poetotherapy and music therapy techniques that can be successfully used in special elementary schools for children aged 8–17 years (N = 10, 4 girls, 6 boys). The aim of this work was to find out how children with multiple disabilities perceive and experience poetotherapy and music therapy intervention. The author assumed that by combining these two expressive therapies, she would achieve greater positive responses that would be manifested in children by increased emotions and positive behavioral changes. She obtained the results on the basis of the participating observation and supplemented them also with individual interviews with the monitored children. Everything was complemented and compared with the personal history of children and the author tried to find some connection between specific diagnoses of children and their experience during poetotherapeutic and music therapy interventions.

The following indicators were monitored in the context of music therapy, poetotherapy and combined music therapy and poetotherapy interventions: Children’s facial expression, their eye contact, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, activity and motor responses to the change of music and musical instruments. At the end of her investigation, the author came to modest results, suggesting that children accept “action” techniques of work better and prefer more repetitive schemes. No matter if they were music therapy or poetotherapy techniques (Froncová, 2008).

Subsequent research concerning the use of elements of poetotherapy is dated 2011. The aim of the bachelor thesis of M. Šotolová was the issue of the use of poetotherapy in the context of touch therapy in children with intellectual disabilities. The author assumed that by combining touches (massages) and presented rhythmic poems, she would achieve greater effects as measured by the increased emotional manifestations of children. The monitored sample of children included ages 3–7 years (N = 10, 3 girls, 7 boys). These were children with mild mental retardation, three of them also had cerebral palsy. Participation observation was used for data collection, therapeutic interventions were repeated twice and sign test was used for data evaluation. The massage of each child lasted approximately 15 minutes and the author performed it on children, especially on the upper and lower limbs and on the face. In her work, she also described in detail the course of the massages and the texts of the used poems, which were presented to children as part of a receptive poetotherapeutic intervention. The reactions of all children were positive. These reactions, however, did

not differ significantly, whether it was a “pure” massage without words or a massage supplemented by a rhythmic and verse poem.

Another bachelor thesis of the student V. Vykopalová related to therapeutic work with text in the clientele of children with specific educational needs. The author also tried to compare bibliotherapeutic and poetotherapeutic techniques and by means of a sign test she evaluated and compared the mood of children manifested in the chosen expression techniques. The author of the research concluded that the mood of children and hence the positive emotional experience during the poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic interventions changed positively. However, was not possible to prove the existence of any significant differences in the use of bibliotherapeutic and, in contrast, poetotherapeutic techniques. This research was also limited by the minimum sample size of the monitored children (N = 8, 4 boys, 4 girls).

The thesis of Z. Halašková from 2016 had a different focus. The author tried to analyze and compare readers' preferences, mastery of Czech grammar and the extent of vocabulary of secondary school youth and also chose a clientele of students with specific learning and behavioral disorders. She compared the results with an intact group of high school students. In her investigation she used her own test material, which included the performance of various literary tasks (inventing words beginning with a certain letter, words beginning with the same prefix, words that differ only in the length of vowels, etc.). These tasks were complemented by a simple questionnaire, which focused primarily on identifying reading preferences. A total of 252 students of the Secondary Agricultural School underwent research, of which 34 were students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties. The analysis of the results of this relatively large sample (using the chi-square statistical test) showed the following data:

- High school students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties have significantly greater problems with grammar rules than their intact peers.
- High school students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties have approximately the same range of active vocabulary as their intact peers.
- High school students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties are approximately as well versed in their text as their intact peers.
- High school students have approximately the same reading preferences. Specific learning disabilities therefore do not affect the qualitative reading choice. It is influenced rather by the pupil's age, their mental maturity and interests (Halašková 2016).

More extensive research concerning the assessment of the relationship of literary creativity in the context of a sample of respondents of the detoxification unit was carried out by J. I. Vinkler in 2018 and the results of his investigation were presented

to the public in his thesis. He assessed the influence of individual poetotherapeutic techniques and assumed the existence of certain links between individual diagnoses and the quality of literary poetic creativity of clients treated for alcoholic and non-alcoholic addiction. He tried to demonstrate with this clientele the indirect link between the depth and degree of their psychological problems and the quality of their literary products.

Vinkler conducted his research in several stages and selected a sample of 11 patients (N = 11, 5 women, 6 men) aged 18 to 66 years. They were patients from different socioeconomic strata who had different professions and education. He obtained data using his own non-standardized JIV 18 test, which contained the following items:

- a) Thinking = Completing positively tuned sentences so as they rhyme
 - b) Recurrence = Adding negative sentences so as they rhyme
 - c) Semaphore = Adding “color-coded sentences” so as they rhyme
 - d) Limeric = Creating a limeric (a playful poem whose first verse repeats at the end)
 - e) Abstinence Decalogue = Reformulating the Decalogue so as it rhymes
 - f) Funnel = Creating a rhymed poem that fits into a scheme of precisely defined syllables
 - g) Neologism = Creation of any verse poem composed of nonsense and neologisms
- (Author’s note: Test items are given for reference only and in abbreviated form.)

The results of the research did not confirm the existence of an indirect link between the increase in the quality of literary poetic creativity and the degree of traumatization of the clients of the detoxification unit. However, the research indicated that the monitored clientele of persons with addictions needs to have clearly defined rules as a springboard for their own, independent work. This boundary proved to be a safe haven and created a platform of freer and thus better literary work for the vast majority of detoxification unit patients. Vinkler also found that when working with this clientele, it is not appropriate to use poetotherapeutic techniques that directly affect addictions, relapse, solitude and other unpleasant topics (Vinkler, 2018).

Another significant survey was conducted by Lenka Kubínová. She described it in more detail in her diploma thesis entitled “Poetry Possibilities in the Diagnosis of Specific Learning Disabilities”. It focused on comparison of vocabulary and perception of rhythm and rhythm of poems in pupils diagnosed with specific learning disabilities and intact pupils. She also created her own non-standardized test using poetotherapeutic material modified for diagnostic purposes.

The author set a total of two hypotheses that were verified in the research, ie in both cases the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, the results of the research showed that pupils with specific learning disabilities do not perceive rhythm and

rhyme the same way as pupils of the control group and also do not have the same developed vocabulary. The author also demonstrated the usefulness of using poetry to diagnose specific learning disabilities. A total of 136 children from the Hradec Králové Region of the Czech Republic and Prague were involved in the research, 32% of whom were diagnosed with some learning disabilities (Kubínová, 2019).

4 Ongoing actual research

Research is currently underway as part of the dissertation of J. I. Vinkler. His research, previously carried out on the detoxification unit, which is described in the previous chapter, is understood in this respect as its pre-research. In the current ongoing research described in the work *Poetotherapeutic intervention in the treatment of addiction*, the investigator is interested in the evaluation of literary creativity of clients who are treated for addictions depending on their length of stay in a detox facility. In particular, Vinkler set out to find a significant link between the length of time clients stay at the detox department and their literary creativity. This basic objective has been established on the basis of previous research and should complement already verified facts concerning therapeutic work with this clientele. In order to achieve this goal, the author uses the quality monitoring of individual selected factors, which in their entirety positively influence the quality of the literary formations. These factors include in particular poetic language, figurative speech, poetic content, rhythm, rhyme, stanza, syntax, image, symbol, comparison, metaphor and personification (Vinkler, 2018).

Vinkler assumes that he will analyze these monitored variables in terms of content and methodological triangulation and will focus this triangulation primarily on the results obtained through his own test, which will be a modification of the RES model (Mazza, 2017).

RES model: This interactive model uses a receptive/normative component that works with an existing poem. The model also includes the expressive/creative component in which the poems are created. In the third, symbolic/ceremonial, and last component of the model, the poems are read aloud before others. The use of existing poems is based primarily on the principle of choosing a poem that is close to the mood of clients. This principle reflects and mirrors the mood of the group and the specific topics that arise during treatment.

The author wants to use group poetry techniques at the end of each therapy session. It is a creation of a group poem, with each participant in the therapy having the opportunity to contribute to the creation of this poem. A group poem will be initiated through a predominant topic or collectively shared feeling in a group session. The poems will be scanned and later physically recorded and their paper copies distributed to all members of the group at the beginning of the next session.

This distribution of copies to the next scheduled therapy session will create the time needed for a better assessment and analysis of the created poetry.

5 Conclusion

From this overview of researches concerning poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic interventions, several basic findings arise. At first glance, it is obvious that there is considerable variability in the direction of the described surveys, as well as the wide range of variations of the issues which are researched. For this reason, it is difficult to draw any more reliable, credible or even transferable conclusions which would relate to most of described surveys at least in some indicators. There are also low numbers of monitored population samples, which participated in most of the researches described above. Their characteristic is also very heterogenous, either concerning the stratification of diagnoses or chronological age of observed persons.

Nevertheless, the researches carefully suggest the importance of therapeutic work with literary formations, whether we are talking about poetry or prose, whether we are talking about active work or ,mere‘ passive reception. Aside from the rather questionable assessment and differentiation of therapeutic work and simple literary education at school. Most of the techniques of working with a literary text described here can be used in both – expressive-therapeutic techniques with proven standard education. It will be interesting to observe where the previous and similar researches will lead and whether they will succeed to prove and by using quantitative or qualitative approaches also verify the usefulness of the use of some of the monitored procedures and techniques for therapeutic practice itself. So far, this has not happened, but the first steps have been taken.

It is also gratifying that this unexplored field of literary creativity and analysis of the success and applicability of various poetotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic techniques in clientele of children and adults with SNP is slowly getting into the attention of young adepts of pedagogical and therapeutic profession and specialization.

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