WORDS KILL – WORDS HEAL: THE BIBLIOTHERAPY VIABILITY OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN COMBATING BULLYING AMONG ADOLESCENTS (A CASE STUDY OF MODERN UKRAINIAN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN)

Abstract. The article summarizes research findings on effective ways to combat bullying among youngsters with an emphasis on the bully-themed books for children. The author highlights the legal aspect and psychological issues of reducing bullying among teenage children with a focus on bibliotherapy efficiency, potential, and importance of children’s literature in deterring bullying. The authors analyze in detail the basic concepts of the study, namely bibliotherapy, bullying participants, criteria for selecting literary works for reading and discussion with children, and the like. The study seeks out to identify how read-aloud helps children relate to bullying situations and how they evaluate learning about such sensitive issues as bullying through reading and discussions. The article analyzes modern trends and themes in the children’s literature with an emphasis on its didactic potentiality and importance for decreasing bullying among minors. The creative methods of organizing the learning process when discussing literary works with children are described. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the bullying-themed books that can be used for bibliotherapy and recommended to the people wishing to utilize this technique, describing step by step the ways of implementing the bibliotherapy technology in children groups. The findings of the study on the approaches to the selection of literature for bibliotherapy are verified by the results of surveys and observation data. Questionnaires and interviews with schoolchildren and educators have revealed that reference to literary works by domestic authors (Ukrainian ones in this case) is more effective and vigorous for bibliotherapetic purposes. The teachers can exploit the findings of this study as a resource to prevent or combat relational bullying in their classrooms. Further research is needed to create a special website for teachers, other
education professionals, and parents to help them to select quality literary works for children to read, thus helping them to cope with the effects of bullying.

**Keywords:** children’s literature, bullying, combating bullying, young adults, bully-themed books, bibliotherapy efficiency, modern Ukrainian children’s literature.

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СЛОВА ВБИВАЮТЬ – СЛОВА ЛІКУЮТЬ: БІБЛІОТЕРАПЕВТИЧНИЙ ПОТЕНЦІАЛ ДИТЯЧОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ У ПОДОЛАННІ БУЛІНГУ СЕРЕД ПІДЛІТКІВ (НА МАТЕРІАЛАХ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ДЛЯ ДІТЕЙ)

Анотація. У статті узагальнюються результати досліджень щодо ефективних шляхів боротьби з таким явищем як злочини серед підлітків з акцентом на творах дитячої літератури, в яких присутня тема булінгу в різних його проявах. Шляхом критичного аналізу існуючих досліджень проблеми у вітчизняній та зарубіжній науці визначено та обґрунтовано актуальність, мета та завдання дослідження щодо ролі дитячої літератури у подоланні важких наслідків жертв булінгу. Проаналізовані результати емпіричного дослідження проблеми булінгу в школах, виявлені найбільш виражені загрози, ризики, форми насильства в підлітковому середовищі. Автори детально аналізують ключові поняття дослідження, а саме: бібліотерапія, учасники булінгу, критерії відбору літературних творів для читання і обговорення з підлітками тощо. Запропоновані перевірені на практиці стратегії організації бібліотерапевтичних занять з дітьми, спрямовані на зменшення проявів злочинь у шкільному середовищі. Визначено як читання та обговорення в групі допомагає дітям змінити своє ставлення до ситуацій, пов’язаних зі злочинами. У статті покроково описані шляхи імплементації технології бібліотерапії у дитячих колективах. Висновки дослідження щодо підходів до відбору літератури для бібліотерапії, підтвердженні показниками результатів опитування. Використовуючи цю інформацію, майбутні дослідження передбачають створення веб-сайту для вчителів, інших освітянських фахівців та батьків, щоб допомогти привернуті до них якісні дитячі літературні твори та запропонувати відповідні стратегії і тактики обговорення цих творів з дітьми.
**Introduction.** Since the first books for young readers appeared, the authors, parents, and critics have been arguing the questions, whether the mission of these books is to educate young people about the world in which they live, or their function is to shield children from all the challenges of the surroundings. Children’s literature has always been a powerful and effective way of socialization. The number of scholars who research academically on children’s literature is increasing with every day. One cannot but agree that books for children are one of the most important genres of writing in literature and the most under-investigated. From the authors, as much as from parents, a child gets an idea of what the world is or should be. These books endow a «budding» individuality with the first behavioral patterns. It uncovers the mystery of why we remember children’s books as our favorites all our life. They teach a child that the world is much more puzzling than he/she might have imagined, and people in this multifaceted world are both alike and different from each other. A genuine children’s book portrays the environment in which the youngest are not powerless. Such books help children confront their deepest fears of being lost, offended, or in mortal danger, and they reinforce a child’s inner ability to cope with those fears. They are an opportunity for a child to escape from frightening surroundings and return to reality, much better equipped to survive in it.

Nevertheless, the surveys manifest that we are raising a generation that doesn’t appreciate the value of literature and its importance. In recent years educators, psychologists, and parents have become increasingly concerned about how electronic devices distract children from books. Teachers and parents often complain that pupils at school and college students have stopped reading because their eyes are stuck to their phones and computers. The writers try special creative techniques to get in touch with young readers. Modern children’s literature aims at breaking through the walls of their clip thinking, scattered attention, and indifference to the literary world thus, attempting to tear off a child from computer games and fascination with gadgets. The goal is not only to attract young readers to a book but having let them into the artistic world of a book, hold them there and force them to think about simple but so vital things.

**Analysis of the research into the problem.** In 2014, professional debates at the International Conference «Canon Constitution and Canon Change in Children’s Literature», held in Germany, focused on the issue of the canons in the world children’s literature and the trends of its development in future. It was attended by the world leading experts in children’s literature, among them were Maria Nikolaieva, Peter Hunt, Anna Muller, Jan Mikoto, Kimberly Reynolds and others. Björn Sundmark, reviewing the reports of Dorota Michulka and Anna Czernow on *Polish Canons of Children’s Literature*, makes a very important statement that the forgotten
classic works of each period are relegated to what the authors call with a metaphor «the Sunken Kingdom», that is an «imaginary space where all forgotten literary texts stay undisturbed by today's readers or scholars» [22, P. 85]. Professor Boris Shalahinov in his article «Children’s Literature: Theoretical Reflections on the Historical Periodization» speaks about modern tendencies to adapt the works of adult classics to the children’s audience: «Currently, the original syncretism in literature definitively disintegrates with its inherent age targeting and gives way to the emergence of the features of «child-centered» aesthetics of art, including social and psychological themes and issues. It is noteworthy that some of the works of previous epochs are purposely adapted to the needs of children’s reading («Don Quixote» by M.de Cervantes, «Gulliver’s Travels» by J.Swift, «Robinson Crusoe» by D. Defoe, etc.) [6, P. 48].

There is a steady turn toward realism in children’s literature, promoting efforts to be more honest with children. However, the public feels alarmed about displays of violence. In the focus of this study is a methodology of combating bullying among youngsters via literary works, using bibliotherapy as a way to facilitate offsetting the negative effects of bullying, war, and disaster. Bringing these adult themes into children’s literature may provide a platform for parents to talk to their children such difficult topics dealing with tragedy, family relationships, and the importance of friendship. It can help strengthen the knowledge of the world around and allow readers to develop their own ideas and opinions.

It seems that the main reason why millions of readers (both children and adults) affiliate to Harry Potter is the fact that they or their nearest and dearest once have been bullied. Bibliotherapy is a counseling technique that uses books to help people solve problems. According to Kurkjian and Livingston, bibliotherapy can be defined as a reading guide, which allows children to share their emotions. It helps them to cope with personal problems and contributes to the development of life skills [15]. All literature for children ought to be didactic. It must by definition be a repository, almost the quintessential source, of the values which parents and others hope to teach to the next generation [18, P. 2].

Though bullying is not the leading theme in many books, some minor episodes of bullying are present in most of them since the subject of bullying is casually mentioned or embedded in the story plot. The fact is that nearly every child faces the effects of bullying in their lives. Children’s authors recognize this as a great trouble for kids, and they endeavor to weave bullying themes into the storylines of their works. The theme of bullying is quite frequent in movies, TV shows, books, and other media. People usually have a general idea of what bullying is and associate it mostly with relationships bullying (often called relational aggression). The study shows that relational bullying occurs quite often among school children.

Recently a new category of bullying has appeared in terminology circulation. It is called cyber-bullying and is defined as «the act of using technologies such as e-mails, cell phones, or text messaging with the intent of causing harm to
This type of bullying is particularly problematic because cyber-bullying is mostly anonymous. Perpetrators can bully others twenty-four hours a day, and insulting or threatening information is accessible to a much larger audience.

Over the last decade, research on bullying and the ways of combating it has demonstrated that the issue is of the top-priority importance. Ukrainian scientists H. Yefremova, L. Lushpai, L. Naidionova, O. Ozhyjova, and others define bullying as a long-term and systematic aggression. According to the data from a survey of the schoolchildren, the highest probability of becoming a victim or a bullying participant concerns the periods of transition from primary to secondary and from secondary to senior or from one school to the other.

This study addresses the above issues from the perspective of D. Olweus’ theory of bullying. D. Olweus argues that “….bullying is characterized by the following three criteria: (a) it is aggressive behavior or intentional «harm-doing»; (b) it is carried out «repeatedly and over time», and (c) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. One might add that the bullying behavior often occurs without apparent provocation. This definition makes it clear that bullying can be considered a form of abuse, and I sometimes use the term peer abuse to label the phenomenon” [19, P. 496].

The goal and the specific tasks of the article. The main purpose of the article is to contribute to a better understanding of such issues as how to incorporate children’s literature in educative process providing for the solution of the bullying problems and healing among adolescents. The study seeks to identify the bullying-themed books that can be used in the bibliotherapy of bullying and be recommended to the people wishing to utilize this technique.

The research methodology is one of the most significant aspects of any study since it highlights the theoretical and methodological procedure of the research and makes the conclusions reliable. Firstly, we used a «literature review» method to explore the growth of children’s literature importance over time and analyze major changes in the form and content. Secondly, we sought out various literary sources for the necessary information, including selection of literary works for bibliotherapy, to reveal what is being written about the issue in the professional journals. The purpose was to support the claim that literature for children has been didactic from the very start and has transformed into more realistic and ambiguous at modern stage. The methodological approach to the research involved the survey of teachers, schoolchildren, and the selection of the strategies for the research procedure, using general scientific methods (analysis, comparison, generalization).

Results and Discussion. The research started by seeking out the literature that elucidates various forms of bullying among children and interprets the role of the children’s literature in combating it. We have studied the books and recent scientific papers thoroughly and can argue that bullying is in the focus of attention in the literature for children this year.
Ukraine is in the top ten in Europe by the range of school harassment among teenage schoolchildren. The most vulnerable are shy and closed to socializing children. Most often, the main reason for their bullying is the fact that they look, speak, and think not like the majority.

Recently, Ukraine has faced one of the most burning issues of relational confrontation caused by the Russian aggression. Internally displaced children are more vulnerable to various forms of conflict-related violence. The changes in the social context affect their social behavior. The UNICEF Children's Fund has calculated that 67% of the Ukrainian students face the problem of bullying, and every year fights between children become more frequent and more violent [5].

Bullying is comprehended in a different way today with its modified forms in modern society. Owing to the researchers like Dan Olweus, society has got a new understanding of bullying, and educators received the instrument which can facilitate the prevention of bullying accidents at schools. It is difficult to predict what bullying forms we will see in the future, but as long as the government adopts the school safety laws, which make bullies legally responsible for their actions, there is a hope that schools will become a safe place for our children [19].

We set a task to find out the most common trends in understanding of bullying among children and adults, asking them which of the following scenarios are an example of bullying (we used the questionnaire suggested by W. Craig in his research):

A. Older boys repeatedly steal a second-grader’s lunch money;
B. A group of girls start and perpetuate vicious rumors about a shy classmate;
C. On a daily basis, a boy makes fun of a peer’s old-fashioned clothes;
D. During recess, bigger kids push, shove, and taunt smaller children;
E. All of the above.

The answers, though being different, mostly correspond to W. Craig’s conclusion: «if you guessed E, you understand the classic definition of bullying: «Bullying is a deliberate attempt to hurt another that is repeated over time». Bullying may be both physical and verbal abuse. Victims are usually different in some way from their peers (dress, size, language, or social skills) and bullying occurs most frequently on the playground or in the locations where there is no adult supervision [11, P. 123].

The next step was to find an answer to the questions about the forms of bullying that predominate among children in the Ukrainian schools. While diagnosing, we have identified the following bullying forms: insults, mockery, nicknames, beating (pushing, etc.). Thirty-two respondents answered the questions about the main reasons for bullying among peers: 35% (11 persons) mentioned the appearance of a student, 25% (8 persons) – a student's behavior, 6% (2 persons) - nationality of a student, 35% (11 people) believe that children in their majority cannot stand up for themselves and repel the insults.
The most widespread form of bullying is relational bullying (often called relational aggression). It involves the behaviors aimed at distorting relationships or expelling others from the peer group. Due to the hidden nature of this behavior, it is difficult to detect the cases of it. It can last for a long time without being noticed. The survey conducted among the schoolchildren embraced the following issues: a) What are the reasons for your dislike of peers?; b) When can children cause aggression and slight their peers?; c) What forms can they manifest it in?

At the top in rating (about 60% of pupils), there was the trivial desire to show who is the leader; 35% of the respondents mentioned the annoying characteristics of their peers, their individual physical features or behavior; more than 20% of the children were unaware that they were harming their peers. According to the data from a survey of the schoolchildren, the highest probability of becoming a victim or a bullying participant concerns the periods of transition from primary to secondary and from secondary to senior forms, or from one school to the other.

All of the collected information was analyzed with the purpose to help practitioners select more confidently the bullying-themed books to read with children, thus expediting their efforts to cope with this common problem. The purpose of an experiment on bullying-themed bibliotherapy is to reveal its authoritative and influential potency. If the number of bullying incidents or negative effects of bullying decreased due to the bibliotherapy, this would be confirmation that this technique is facilitating and effective in the educative work with the children who are involved in bullying. In the context of incorporating bibliotherapy in combating bullying, we can hardly overestimate the role of libraries.

«Talking about the book-characters’ choices help students learn about their own possible solutions to bullying problems. With the help of an informed, compassionate adult, bullies can begin to develop empathy skills, victims can acquire strategies that will help them deal with bullies, and bystanders can realize the important role they have in preventing this aggressive, taunting behavior. T. Harnett, a Civil Rights Attorney once mentioned «One person speaking up makes more noise than a thousand people who remain silent.» [12, P. 36].

The study of the experience of the Children's Discussion Club Words Kill, organized on the basis of the local library for young adults, illustrates perfectly well how this activity can facilitate a solution of two burning problems: overcoming the outdated ideas about the role of children's library in modern civil society and reducing the level of violence among children. The project of the «Words Kill» discussion club demonstrates to children how many opportunities for self-expression, self-development and meaningful leisure time a children’s library can provide, creating conditions for tolerant communication in the youth environment.

Modern literature education at schools in Ukraine has accumulated many problems, among which the most urgent is the lack of proper professionalism in those who, by their scientific and official status, should solve them. However, we will not focus on this aspect. In contrast to the Western countries, where the so-called «young
adult» literature was formed long ago, this trend has just begun to take shape in Ukraine. However, in the last two years, it has become so powerful that we can speak not only about quantitative but also about qualitative «explosion» of interesting works written with a focus on the teenage audience. New authors appeared in the domain of the Ukrainian children’s literature. Among them, Serhii Grydin (stories: *The Incomprehensible, Non-angel, A Desperate*, etc.), Nadiia Bila (*Cool Company*), Maria Morozenko (*I Fell in Love*), Iryna Matsko (*Transition Age of...My Mom*), Yuliia Cherniienko (*Revenge*), Anastasia Nikulina (*Salt for the Sea or the White Whale*), and many others. We ought to pay tribute to the *Academia* publishing house, which sensed the demand for young adult literature and began to fill up the new niche in our national literature, doing it quite successfully. The importance of this phenomenon is undeniable because it is about meeting the reading needs of the younger generation, which, with some exceptions, contemporary Ukrainian literature has offered so little. Focusing on the target audience of readers, the authors not only state and skillfully integrate the facts of violence and harassment into the plot but build an adequate model of the character’s behavior in the situations that arise, offering a frank conversation with children.

The writer and psychologist Yulia Cherniienko, who recently has made her literary debut with a teenage story «Revenge», in her interview, when asked whether literature could become a panacea for teenage baiting, responded: «Writers reflect the whole world in their works, with its joys and troubles. Therefore, books about bullying are a good chance to start a dialogue between adults and teenagers. Educators can take this into account because traditional edifying classes have already exhausted their potential up to full, but discussing the books in some interesting format and manner is a way to find a thread leading to a trustful friendly conversation. Our brain is a complex, powerful and ... lazy system. It generates specific «behavioral patterns». It is something like «passing tracks» in computer games. Reading only «sweet» stories with a happy end may distort the perception of reality. One ought to understand that phrases like «my child is not like this» or «it is too early for my child» indicate the adult’s unwillingness to initiate a sincere and trusting dialogue. Watching performances or good films, one learns to empathize with the characters and to perceive the world with their eyes, thus developing the capacity for empathy. You can gain empathic experience by reading good literary works, imagining yourself in the place of the heroes, and experiencing their feelings» [7].

Children identify themselves with fictional characters and bullying situations both at a cognitive and emotional level and gain understanding or reflection much more easily than talking directly about their own experiences [13, P. 700].

The preparedness of people engaged and interested in the bibliotherapy, as well as the bullying-themed books, need to be primarily identified before recommending this or that work of the children’s literature for reading and discussing. A survey appears to be essential and beneficial in this context. We interviewed librarians,
teachers, school social workers (52 respondents) about their willingness and preparedness to utilize the bibliotherapy technique to reduce bullying among youngsters and about the ways to improve the situation. The professional development (conferences, workshops) is beneficial in view of 41% (22 persons) from 52 respondents, 39% (20 persons) of them supported more informal training. A small group informed that they had got certification (6% – 3 persons), whereas, nearly 14% (7 persons) claimed to have had no training at all. When asked about the approaches to a book selection for bibliotherapy, the participants of the survey reported on several strategies (most respondents supported two, or even all of the strategies): 98% read the book themselves, 73% rely on the recommendations, the book reviews were helpful for 37% of respondents and 29% claimed that they rely on their intuition in book selection. The identification of the specific problems which the minors face in their classrooms has been carried out using the questionnaires described above, personal interviews, and observations.

C. Corman states: «It is vital to remember that bibliotherapy is essentially personal. Behavioral results are not always readily perceived; attitudinal changes are not subject to standardized measurements. For those reasons, it is difficult to offer more than suggestions of possible approaches and sources from which the teacher might choose according to the situation». [10, P. 936].

The meticulous analysis of foreign experience and the conclusions of the prominent scholars give grounds to argue that the bibliotherapy technique implementation procedure involves four steps: 1) identification (to identify a specific problems the youngsters may face in the classroom); 2) selection (to select the books with a similar situation); 3) presentation (reading a book together or independently); 4) follow-up (to analyze the stories, seeking out any portrayals of relational or another kind of bullying, including the identification of the bullies, victims, and bystanders/onlookers).

In view of the purpose of this article, we focused on the selection of the appropriate stories that correlate with the students' characteristics and the nature of bullying situations among them. The purpose was to expand the possibilities for children to identify themselves with story characters. It was the most challenging task of this stage of the research. We have selected 5 books by the Ukrainian authors from the long list of the fictional stories on bullying: «Revenge» by Yuliia Cherniienko, «Salt for the Sea or the White Whale» by Anastasia Nikulina, T. Kornienko’s psychological fairy-tale «The Immaculate», Serhii Grydin’s «The Incomprehensible», Nadiia Bila’s «Cool Company».

The choice of these Ukrainian authors was not accidental as we were driven by two goals. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to promote Ukrainian children's literature, and secondly, the situations and life stories described in these works are closer and more responsive to the Ukrainian minors. They position themselves faster and more openly with the characters in the books by Ukrainian authors. The obtained in the selected books information and each book’s content are analyzed in terms of
the type of bullying behavior, presence of the bystanders, the adult involvement, and the problem-solution means. The analysis gives grounds to argue that verbal bullying was the most commonly observed, followed by the physical and cyber-bullying. Anastasia Nikulina, in her novel *Salt for the Sea or the White Whale*, describes the greatest number of bullying forms (abusive words, pushing, physical and moral humiliation, cyber-bullying).

The victims in the 5 selected books chose various tactics to oppose bullying: rumination as a coping strategy, ignoring, manifesting their irritation or hatred to the bully, trying to hide from or avoid the bully, some did what the bully said and sought to make friends with him, and a few reacted physically to the bully. The study findings indicate that most books promoted revenge tactics as the solution to bullying. Additional coping responses were also identified and listed. Among them are derogatory inscriptions on the desk and board, spoiled things, cruel jokes, and even rape attempts.

The basic stages of bibliotherapeutic process involve reading a book together or independently, then completing the steps of identifying oneself with the characters or story, releasing emotions, and applying the insights gained to own life situations. We handed out the questionnaires, asking the children to consider the following issues:

1) Name the character you are related to the most in the story;
2) Explain how the actions of this or that character were similar to yours;
3) How would you respond to the bullying of (name of a character), etc.

In each questionnaire, we inserted the names of the bullying victim(s) of the story under discussion. The purpose was to increase the potential for students to identify themselves with the story characters and reinforce the reading activity. They were asked to identify the incidents of bullying at their school. In addition, the students performed creative writing activities (for instance, they were asked to write an essay about the danger of the onlookers’ passivity promoting the resumption of the phenomenon, etc. In fact, the students were engaged in role-playing activities. The obtained in the selected books information was analyzed in terms of a type of bullying behavior, presence of bystanders, adult involvement, and the problem solution strategies.

The analysis of respondents’ essays, their personal stories, observations, and comments, based on reading materials, argue that in most cases, the bullying victims suffer from being lonely and having no one to share their problems with when they need someone who really empathizes and can give advice. As seven-year-old Elza from the *My Grandmother Sends her Regards and Apologizes* by Fredric Backman says that «having a sympathetic grandmother is like having an army». This is a grandchild’s ultimate privilege: knowing that someone is on your side, always, whatever the details. F. Bachman makes us realize that one exceptionally supportive adult in the life of a kid can make a huge difference [1].
Reading and discussing stories on bullying promoted the youngsters to ponder: who among us was not, at least once, either an abuser or offended, who was not mistaken, don’t we sometimes feel guilty of not being able to defend our self-dignity, etc. And if these questions, this resistance arise, we can give a sigh of relief! It is a lucky chance to counteract bullying. It is already a therapy with reading, correction with a book, education without obsessive didactics. «Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts» states Nikki Giovanni [14].

Conclusions. An in-depth content analysis of the bullying-themed books contributes significantly to a better understanding of the bullying nature and ways to confront it. The key findings of this study argue that bibliotherapy in preventing the widespread presence of bullying and as a method to combat it requires correctness and profound knowledge for its effective implementation. It is necessary to follow the recommended steps, an adequate methodology, and training to achieve the rewarding effects, reducing anxiety and stress, improving psychosocial health, well-being, and quality of the children's life. The implementation of this technique could favor the humanization of learning process, especially when we talk about minors who usually lack the proper knowledge and appropriate coping strategies. Using this research’s results, further studies will include creating a website for teachers, other professionals in education, and parents to help them to bring quality children’s literature to the attention of our children. The hope is that teachers will begin to use the findings of this study as a resource with their students to prevent or oppose relational bullying in their classrooms, and recommend it to school psychologists, counselors, and parents, when needed.

References

Література:


