

Scientific  
Journal of  
**Applied  
Social and  
Clinical  
Science**

**LER COM A ALMA  
(TO READ WITH THE  
SOUL): THE BOOK AS  
A BIBLIOTHERAPEUTIC  
TOOL**

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**Abstract:** The “Ler com (c)Alma” (“To read with the soul”) project was developed by the Municipal Library of Baião, reaching different audiences – school community, seniors and the general public – but with common objectives in relation to both: promoting books and reading, creating new readers and consolidating existing reading habits, promoting the municipal library’s collection, working on children’s self-esteem through children’s literature, as well as helping children identify their emotions to better know how to deal with them, recognizing and valuing the therapeutic dimension of the book, as well as providing feelings of inner peace, tranquility and lightness, making the library a space of refuge that allows you to overcome the stress and worries of everyday life, highlighting the role of the library as a space for silence, reading and reflection. This project ended up being, in fact, a set of bibliotherapeutic sessions, during which we were able to understand the impact of the book, its characters and stories on the self-knowledge and management of emotions of the participants, who at the end of the project ended up witnessing that the various sessions contributed to their psychological well-being, emotional expression in mourning and a sense of belonging, among other positive impacts.

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, therapeutic reading, bibliotherapeutic components, *mindfulness*

## INTRODUCTION

From an etymological perspective, bibliotherapy comes from Greek and is a word formed by two distinct lexemes, namely “biblion” (book) and “terapeia” (therapy). In a more literal sense, we can understand its meaning as “therapy through books”. Abreu, Zulueta and Henriques (2013, p. 97) state that bibliotherapy “serves to reflect, enjoy, care, heal”, developing the concept as follows:

« bibliotherapy is an activity with preventive

and therapeutic aspects that, through reading fiction or self-help books, individually or in a group, has the purpose of providing an experience of restoring health, or allowing continued development, at any age of the child. life cycle”.

According to Ferreira (2016, p. 1), in order for «children to feel motivated to learn how to learn, they need to be comfortable in their educational environment and in carrying out group activities, which will only be possible if friendly relationships are fostered between colleagues”. Now, for children to feel good about themselves and to be able to relate well with others, it is important that they have good self-esteem, that they know how to deal with their emotions and that they explore values such as gratitude, kindness and respect. Meditation, specifically decentering meditation, commonly known as mindfulness, could be a good practice with a view to not only self-knowledge but also knowledge about the Other and the world around us.

Thus, with the municipal librarian having training and certification as a meditation instructor for children, as well as training in the area of bibliotherapy, the “Biblioteca Municipal de Baião” conceived and implemented the project “Ler com a Alma” (“To read with the soul”), which combined mindfulness practices with reading therapy. This project included in its target audience the most diverse age groups, from children in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle, to the general public (mostly aged between 14 and 62 years old), having also carried out some sessions, although more punctual, with the senior community. Throughout the school year, five fortnightly sessions were held with classes from two groups of schools, totaling 92 children covered every fortnight. Besides, over 12 months – from January to December – a total of 174 participants were covered, in the monthly sessions, held on the first Friday of each month, at the Municipal Library facilities.

## DEVELOPMENT

Each session began with an introduction to the topic that would be explored through one or more texts, taken from books that were part of the library's collection, followed by the reading of these books or excerpts and subsequent discussion about them, which often gave rise to originating testimonial reports from participants who, through different bibliotherapeutic components, such as identification, projection or introspection, received the text and interpreted it according to their worldview, relating it to their personal experiences. These readings therefore contributed to the awakening of emotions that, in some way, had some relevance for the participants, leading them to share with the group and better understand not only what they felt about the subject but also how they could resolve these issues. internal conflicts, because through similar sharing, they realized that there were ways to get around or resolve internal issues that they saw portrayed in the text read and with which they identified. In order to promote the assimilation of information and sharing of this therapeutic reading session, a moment of relaxation followed through mindfulness practices, such as breathing exercises, with a view to internal and external calm and tranquility, to the sound of music instrumental with a melody that provided these same sensations, and creative visualization, asking each participant to close their eyes and imagine what the instructor was describing, which always consisted of peaceful scenarios, which provided feelings of security and well-being to the participants. participants. It must be noted that, during all mindfulness sessions, participants were always in their conscious state, as the practices used do not require any state of altered consciousness, therefore not posing any risk to their mental health; quite the contrary, according to testimonies from

participants, these sessions provided a feeling of physical, emotional and psychological well-being. At the end of each session, several books available at the Municipal Library for home loan were presented that were somehow related to the theme developed in each session (depression, self-esteem, gratitude, inner peace, anxiety), which led to a increase not only in the number of library readers but also in the number of home loans.

In schools, these sessions were taught in an identical way, with books appropriate to the age group being selected and which addressed the themes selected for each session, such as, for example, «Leonardo, the terrible monster» which calls for non-judgment of the Other, «The color monster» that addresses different emotions, «The angry book “which refers to anger, “I am afraid!” which precisely addresses fear and how to overcome it, «Butterfly Ears» which addresses bullying and contributes to children's self-worth and self-esteem, «The bird of the soul» which helps to recognize emotions, «How do you make peace? » which provides guidelines for peaceful and harmonious relationships, «Maria Morte» which explains what death is, exploring the feelings that come from the grieving process and «Manel, the faithful friend» which values animals as sentient beings, highlighting kindness and altruism. At the end of the school year, testimonies were collected not only from children but also from teachers about the impact of this project on this public: one of the teachers, from a 1st cycle class, said that this project “was beneficial for the children because, in addition to It is worth noting that they are calmer and that they relate better with their colleagues, they perform much better in creative writing”, which we believe could be a direct consequence of regular reading practice, as well as creative visualization, promoted by mindfulness sessions . One of the children, from a 1st cycle class, said that

it was only after reading the book “Maria Morte” and practicing mindfulness related to the topic that he was able, for the first time, to cry over the death of his grandfather, who passed away approximately of a month, thanking the instructor at the end for making this happen as she felt it was good for her, so reading and meditative practice contributed to the catharsis that was so necessary for this child for the sake of her emotional and psychological well-being. A 9th year student also testified that these sessions helped to reinforce her self-esteem and self-worth, helping her to overcome bullying situations that she was occasionally the target of.

## CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration, all the testimonies collected at the end of this project, it seems clear to us the role that books and reading have in self-discovery of oneself, the Other and the world. Proust (2020, p. 38-39), in his book “On Reading”, argues that the deep relationship that the reader ends up establishing with the characters, whose emotions end up merging with their own, allows us to achieve the self-knowledge because, despite the characters being nothing more than “beings that tomorrow will be no more than a name on a forgotten page, in a book with no relation to life”, they contain within them “the universe and destiny”, making the reader understand who you are and what you want in life because the book leads us to a deep reflection on life by presenting it to us from different perspectives, through the worldview of the characters, through which we often find our own.

Although it is not the librarian’s

responsibility to work on the human psyche, something that will undoubtedly be the responsibility of the psychologist and psychiatrist, that information professional can make use of his literary and human skills to explore the book in a therapeutic way and, through the different bibliotherapeutic components, such as identification, projection or introspection, lead the reader to reflect on what they feel and learn about other worldviews besides their own. According to Caldin (2009, p. 57), «the librarian who intends to develop bibliotherapy activities must, first of all, be interested in the human aspect of the profession» and «it is essential to demonstrate empathy, interest and concern for the well-being of the another, knowing how to listen to other people’s problems”; the same author (ibidem) adds that «emotional stability, good physical health, good character, mastery of literary texts and theoretical foundation are prerequisites for the bibliotherapy practitioner, who at no time calls himself a therapist». Bibliotherapeutic sessions are, in fact, an informal conversation between the reader of the text and the listeners, in which the book serves as a mediator and can trigger the identification of sensations that, being verbalized through sharing with other participants or just with the advisor sessions, lead to self-knowledge. So, although bibliotherapy is not a science nor does it intend to become a psychoanalytic procedure, “it uses speech as a therapeutic aid in the form of dialogue that the literary text gives rise to, immediately after reading, the narration or dramatization of the story, with the purpose of appeasing emotions, causing pleasurable relief” (idem, p.155).

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