In February 2014 the Department of Library & Information Science of the University of Pécs launched a continuing professional training programme in bibliotherapy, which has become the Hungarian center of the person-centered approach in this field. Nowadays it is the major and most successful center of Hungarian bibliotherapy education. Our two-year-long postgraduate programme is available for BA or MA degree holders in arts and humanities, teacher training, mental health care, medical sciences, economy, law, and theology. Our trainees are usually practitioners from various fields who would like to use therapeutic reading and writing to complement their work (such as librarians, teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health workers, social workers, addiction counselor assistants, bereavement assistants, judges, HR professionals, theologians, etc.). (http://kpvk.pte.hu/content/biblioterapia)

Through the whole programme (395 hours, 120 credits) students receive intensive instruction in major disciplinary fields necessary for bibliotherapist practitioners working in developmental or clinical context, such as the basics of psychotherapy and mental health, group dynamics, selection and interactive use of materials, bibliotherapy for special target groups, and supervision. 100 hours of peer experience as a participant in a supportive therapy group is an essential part of the training programme. Bibliotherapy workshops and field visits offered as further opportunities for exploring the benefits of various facilitation techniques.

On completion of the qualification the trainees will be able to plan and facilitate person-centered, interactive sessions using imaginative literature, non-fiction materials and creative writing, promoting personal growth. The person-centered approach of our school is based on the integrated principles of the humanistic psychology and expressive arts therapies. (ROGERS, 1993). Given our model is person-centered instead of the traditional book-centered approach of the biggest part of Hungarian bibliotherapists, it suggests to deal with some potentials hidden within and between the participant persons. (BÉRES, 2016b) According to this approach, the readings and other materials elicit participants’ subjective emotional response shaped by their identity and life-experience, offering a tool for their projections, and discovering personal meanings through dynamic processes of transforming one kind of relevancy, unconscious, to another, conscious. (HOLLAND, 1968) From this viewpoint the main question is about why a certain person responds to literary works and other materials as s/he does, and how her/his introjections shape the personal interpretation of the materials. This enables the participant to stand both inside and outside that interpretation so as to observe and understand it. This act of insight, accompanied by group interactions and co-constructions of meanings may help people to reflect on their lives, and lead the person toward new attitudes and new motivations for action.
Our graduated bibliotherapists provide bibliotherapy sessions in various settings of public institutions and local community (e.g. in public libraries, schools, prisons, shelter houses, care homes, psychiatric wards, rehabilitation services). According to Cohen, the biggest part of our bibliotherapy sessions works in closed, small groups organized in theme-appropriate approach, focusing on personal therapeutic experiences and group process phenomena. (COHEN, 1989). In Hungary there are more and more bibliotherapy groups for vulnerable women (adolescents, pregnant women, abused mothers living in shelter houses, prisoners, elderly, cancer rehabilitation patients). In addition, a number of groups are available for other people facing substance abuse, social disadvantages, normative life crises, traumas, partnership problems, dementia, parenting, imprisoning, and other mental health issues. Bibliotherapists attending the ‘Pécs programme’ are regular members of the Hungarian Literatherapy Association (http://www.irodalomterapia.hu/).

In the recent few years the popularity of bibliotherapy services has been increasing. This tendency raises questions of educational opportunities and research partnerships. The ‘Pécs School’ established new research partnerships with Finnish and British bibliotherapists. We started to offer bibliotherapy workshops for those countries where no bibliotherapy education is available, for instance at the Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic). Until now our partners are from the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Finland, United Kingdom, and Italy. Our main goal is to build a network both in research and education as well as in the field of public services. In 2015 we initiated a joint effort for development of innovative, person-centered services applicable regionally. (BÉRES, 2016a). Besides offering workshops and research partnerships, the most important outcome of this project is an international bibliotherapy database which is under construction at the moment. The database aims to connect people to helpful and inspiring books, highlights useful materials and provide health information for users and their families. This database gains inspiration from an external partner, the Center of Alcohol Studies Library at the Rutgers University in New Brunswick (NJ, USA). With their project titled 'Reading for Recovery' (R4R) led by a medical librarian, Judit Hajnal Ward, American colleagues are building a bibliotherapy database targeting patients, families and professionals related to substance abuse issues. (WARD, 2016) Our database follows the R4R model, but tends to cover more topics and target groups with which we work and have multiple experiences. We plan to collect best practices in bibliotherapy and offer multilingual bibliotherapeutic descriptions of suitable materials. This database can add also to the reader’s advisory toolkit of librarians, complement traditional therapies, and extend peoples’ support outside of traditional therapeutic settings.

It would be nice to involve more countries to create the database items in their own national languages. I invite Finnish colleagues who are willing to be involved in this work.

References


