

AFCC Writers & Illustrators Conference

Biblio-therapy: Its Place in Children's Literature 19th May 2017

Dimity Powell – Handout Notes

Session Objective: To explore the value of creating biblio-therapy themed diverse picture books and debate their usefulness in combating various social issues affecting children. To discuss what works, what doesn't and why.

Applicable for:

- Authors
- Illustrators
- Care Givers / families
- Children
- Grief, mental health, well-being organisations
- Schools / Teachers / Librarian / early childhood workers
- Counsellors
- Domestic Violence organisations

3 TAKEAWAY POINTS

1. The value of biblio-therapy themed *picture books* and its relationship to diversity in children's literature
2. The best ways to tackle sensitive story issues to make them both compelling and saleable. Market analysis (*She'll share her story's journey from conception to completion. Dimity will explain that by understanding the truths about marketability versus story integrity, creators are better equipped to tackle the 'too hot to handle' social issues prevalent in our modern societies, thus enabling them to produce enlightening books for both young readers and publishers to appreciate and love.)*
3. Recognition of the positive impact addressing diverse social issues in children's books has on creating sound societal wellbeing, increased empathy, and heightened awareness in our communities, with reflection on how this translates globally (*She'll illustrate why she believes picture books are one of the best conduits for delivering diversity in children's literature today no matter what the cultural divide)*

WHAT IS BIBLIO-THERAPY?

Biblio-therapy is an expressive therapy that involves the reading of specific texts with the purpose of healing. It uses an individual's relationship to the content of books, poetry, and other written words as therapy.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?

The recognition of differences and inclusion of them in ongoing conversations to ensure the lives and situations of all (young) people are reflected and honoured through the written word.

Why is it important?

Because it allows children to identify with themselves through characters while also experiencing vicariously the lives of characters that are different from them, thus enabling them to find their place in the world and instilling a sense of empowerment.

These two concepts are often united in literature, namely picture books.

Why? *There is no topic too taboo for the picture book medium to address because it can relay them in a safe and nonjudgmental format and as such, I believe they should be embraced and studied by age groups far beyond those they are written for.*

The kinds of **themes and topics** they can allude to include (but are not limited to):

- Dealing with emotional hurt, loss, grief
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social issues and relationships
- Family makeup and structure
- Cultural situations / Global tensions
- Welcoming differences
- LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual) issues

WHAT SHOULD BIBLIO-THERAPY DELIVER?

- Global recognition of diverse social issues
- Increased empathy
- Heightened community awareness
- Better cultural understanding
- Improved emotional and mental health
- Increased emotional resilience and well-being
- Positive acknowledgment of one's sense of self and place in the world
- Stronger understanding of acceptance and tolerance
- Permission to hurt
- Solace

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HOW IS THIS ACHIEVED IN CHILDREN'S WRITING?

- o Metaphorically vs. Didactically
 - o Perspectives
 - o Visual Narratives
 - o Symbolically
 - o Entertaining storylines
 - o Objective Correlative (objects with symbolic purpose)
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- ✓ Dare to be different
 - ✓ Write from the heart
 - ✓ Marketability versus Integrity
 - ✓ Remember your audience

TARGET AUDIENCES / WHO CAN BENEFIT?

- o Teachers
- o Teacher Librarians
- o Parents / Care givers
- o Professional counselling and guidance workers
- o Child psychologists
- o Support Organisations
- o Children / Young people

PICTURE BOOKS AS CONDUITS FOR DIVERSITY AND BIBLIO-THERAPEUTIC RESOURCES

- ✓ Universal appeal
- ✓ Successful in neutral portrayal of any ethnicity, disability, emotional impairment
- ✓ Ability to visually and audibly entertain
- ✓ Non-judgmental and relevant across a period of time
- ✓ Relay a range of hefty, intense, taboo, sensitive subject matter

LINKS AND RESOURCES:

- o Children's author Dimity Powell www.dimitypowell.com
- o SCBWI contributor / illustrator Anne Sibley O'Brien www.AnneSibleyOBrien.com
- o www.weneeddiversebooks.org
- o EK Books www.ekbooks.org
- o Child Bereavement Support Singapore www.cbss.sg
- o Melissa Wray www.melissawray.blogspot.com.au
- o Paradise Kids Australia www.paradisekids.org.au