

Reading with Children: A Storybook Guide for Art Therapists

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Background

Narrative Therapy

People recount life experiences through stories. Narrative therapy offers the space for clients to re-write stories containing their issues, and in this process, gain insight to transform their own stories (Carr, 1998).

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is client gaining insight to problem solving through facilitated support in reading materials that have been written (Akgun & Benli, 2019). The purpose of bibliotherapy is geared towards increasing client's self awareness to make room for new discoveries, leading to changes in perspectives and problem solving.

Art therapy

Art therapy's role is to collaborate with narrative therapy and bibliotherapy as a potential technique in practice. For example, after the client tells a story or reads a book, the reflection afterwards can be conducted with art therapy techniques.

Developmental Theories

This project is informed by Piaget's stages of cognitive development, which are: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. According to McLeod (2019), Vygotsky names the area known as the zone of proximal development as where teachings should be aimed at for the most effective learning. The child gains the most from interactions with various individuals as opposed to learning on their own.

Gaps

The literature suggests that storybooks intended for bibliotherapy use is not a common topic of research (Akgun & Benli, 2019). In the writing, professionals mention the need for more information about bibliotherapy, which can lead to a higher likelihood for them to offer storybook usage in their practice (Akgun & Benli, 2019). Much of the information about the effectiveness for storybooks in therapy is based on therapists' personal experience, and many are not replicated for reliability. Increasing therapists' understanding around the storybooks' effectiveness can promote a wider range of usage, and encourage informative exchanges within the art therapist community.

Rationale

Professional

I first experimented with using storybooks to facilitate the opening activity for each session in my practicum, and later, extended it to parts of the therapy session with the client's permission. This included selecting books containing similar themes to the client's issue and reading it together with the client, encouraging the client to find their own meaning from the insight they gained from the story, and facilitating the client's own story telling.

Personal

I recognized the benefits of stories, whether they are being told or being read. I witnessed how the three approaches, narrative therapy, bibliotherapy, and art therapy can combine together in practice. I had shared these experiences with my supervisors, and art therapy peers. In general, they found them useful with their clients. I felt that a list of storybooks as a resource will have practical use in the art therapy community.

Project Details



The 30 book bibliography contains a detailed summary of each book, the recommendation for which clients/situations it can facilitate, a potential art therapy exercise if applicable, key words that make it easier to find in the index, and a creative background to represent the book.

The process includes completing the written portion and gathering individual pieces together in a guidebook format. Each of the 3 age ranges (early, middle, late) have their own section, beginning after each title. Books that straddle multiple age ranges have their own section. The goal is to loosely resemble a picture book, where each book summary has its own page. The background picture serves to represent the main idea of the book, or have some relation to the characters, story, or issue.



ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reflections

I personally love reading picture books. With enough free time, I can spend a whole day in the library or a book store reading picture books. Being able to combine one of my favorite pastimes with my passion for art therapy is nothing short of amazing. One of my dreams for the future is to have a picture book corner in my own art therapy studio. I am grateful for the support and encouragement from my supervisors for me to bring picture books into my sessions with the clients. Experiencing success with many clients allows me to see the benefits of combining art therapy and bibliotherapy. Even though not all the clients are receptive, it is helpful to have another option. Talking about this with my peers provides the space to share resources. Hearing about the successes from my peers who used my book recommendations confirms the need for a compilation of resources.



Moving Forward

It is my hope that art therapists with an interest in adding bibliotherapy into their practice will find this resource useful. This may spark some interest in those who have not come across this type of art therapy/bibliotherapy/narrative therapy collaboration.



As the enthusiasm for this approach increases, it can lead to more information and resource sharing in the community. In this way, resources can be pooled in one place for easier access. This can prompt further research in the area around the benefits and effectiveness of using picture books in professional art therapy practice. In turn, others can openly share their own recommendations and experiences, whether in annotated bibliographies or other formats, so that more people can come in contact with the concept, leading to new ideas and possibilities in the future.