

Sense Making: Using Narrative Storytelling in Play Therapy Across the Lifespan

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Narrative Storytelling...

- The very history of humankind is a story full of stories.
- Religious traditions are rich in stories, from biblical parables to Zen Buddhist or Sufi tales.
- We live in (and through) stories; family myths, traditions, and anecdotes.
- Stories are the fabric of our private lives, our relational networks, our social traditions, and our cultural and historical institutions.

Dewey's Three-Dimensional Narrative Approach

- Educational theorist John Dewey has a three-dimensional narrative structure approach (interaction, continuity and situation) and finding meaning is central to his philosophy of experience in a personal and social context.
- Dewey's narrative approach posits that to understand people we need to examine not only their personal experiences but also their interactions with other people.
- Dewey's three-dimensional approach has had a major influence on the practice of narrative inquiry in many disciplines.
- It offers a sense of fluidity in storytelling, moving from the past to the present or into the future.

Dewey's Three-Dimensional Narrative Approach

- Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly advanced three aspects of Dewey's narrative approach to create a three-dimensional space narrative structure:
 - *Personal and Social* (Interaction).
 - *Past, Present, and Future* (Continuity).
 - *Place* (Situation).

Narrative Storytelling...

- When working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, our own experiences of being a clinician will be relevant to the clients' narratives.
- It is impossible as a clinician to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self.
- We may see ourselves in the midst of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; You may see ourselves in the middle of clients' stories and our own stories.

Art-Based Activities & Storytelling



Why Is Storytelling Effective...

- The client can use stories as a form of verbalized fantasy through which they may reveal their inner drives and conflicts.
- Some of the primary themes expressed during storytelling include anxiety, guilt, wish fulfillment, and aggressiveness.
- It has been found that storytelling is most valuable when the client determines the subject matter of their story.

Why Is Storytelling Effective...

- Creating Meaning and Coherence
- Factors determining whether clients experience healing in a therapeutic setting may include their capacity to tell their story, the opportunity given to do so, and the invitation to make the narrative of central aspects of their experience that will be heard.
- As a form of sense-making or thinking, a story also serves several functions:
 - It brings order.
 - Sequence.
 - A sense of completion to any given experience.

Storytelling In Therapeutic Settings...

Cognitive Organization

- Clients typically don't bring their difficulties to therapy all tied up in a neat intellectual package.
- Clients usually present, what is for them, a bewildering array of painful feelings, self-characterizations, situations, and life events.
- Clients often lack a solid understanding of their problems and their causes, much less any clear notion as to what form of corrective action/experiences to take.

Storytelling In Therapeutic Settings...

- In a therapeutic setting, a story is a cognitive package.
- Stories contain a sequence of events, with discernible relations between these events, all leading to some sort of conclusion.
- Stories that are well tailored to a client's dilemmas may achieve a number of worthwhile ends.
- Clinicians can then help clients see important relationships that may have escaped them previously.

Why Is Storytelling Effective (Children)...

- Storytelling can be used selectively with children as young as 3 and as old as 15 years, although the most effective age range seems to be school age to early adolescence (roughly 5 to 12 years).
- Many children are rarely able to use verbalized communication fully.
- Playful techniques like doll play, [therapeutic] games, painting and drawing, can be used either alone or in conjunction with prompted narratives.

Storytelling In Therapeutic Settings...

- A related approach is the co-construction of the story, where the therapeutic story is not predesigned but developed by the clinician and client as part of the therapeutic intervention.
- Therapeutic stories could be used within a wide range of theoretical orientations and, therefore, can be regarded as a transtheoretical tool and be used to integrate various approaches.
- Storytelling enhances the effectiveness and efficacy of communication and can facilitate reciprocal communication during sessions.

Card Games: Therapeutic or Traditional



Model of Therapeutic Relationships...

- The therapeutic value of storytelling can be realized through contributing to the establishment of a therapeutic relationship.
- Greenson (1967) developed a model of therapeutic relationships that consists of three components:
 - Working Alliance
 - **Transference/Countertransference**
 - Real Relationship.

Model of Therapeutic Relationships...

- **Transference:** A client saying the clinician is like 'an elder family member' when telling a story.
- **Countertransference:** Storytelling may induce feelings of countertransference because this is a typical activity between the clinician and someone in their personal life.

Model of Therapeutic Relationships...

- The transference/countertransference configuration can play a positive, neutral or negative role in mental health treatment.
- Transference and countertransference occurring during therapeutic storytelling can be used by the clinician to understand the client's feelings and life experiences. ,

Clinician's Use of Self

- The clinician's knowledge about the personal self is essential to the therapeutic process.
- Our human relationship with clients is the medium through which the work of therapy is done.
- Many clinicians need to work through their own human vulnerability to engage in the purposeful use of their “selves” in therapeutic spaces with clients.

Clinician's Use of Self...

- If clinicians become less self-resolved and use more capacity in the moment of therapeutic engagement with clients, they can then become conscious of their own related personal struggles and vulnerabilities to resonate and empathize with their clients' pains and issues.
- By doing this, clinicians can gain a deeper understanding of their client's experiences and intuition into the dynamics of their current state during the therapeutic process.

Clinician's Use of Self...

- **Interoceptive Awareness** - the ability to sense, process, and appropriately respond to the body's physiological signals.
- **Embodiment** - feeling the sensations, thoughts, and emotions within us and living in that experience.
- **Self-Regulation** - is our ability to regulate our reactions to emotions like frustration or excitement.

LEGO-Based Storytelling



Post Story Discussion

- It is often beneficial to explore the client's understanding of the stories at the conclusion of storytelling.
- At times, post-story inquiry can provide a point of departure for discussing the client's conflicted feelings, fantasies, or themes that are relevant to recent experiences.
- **AVOID** suggesting a certain similarity between some features of the story and a recent experience of the client.

Wrap-Up...

- Questions?
- Comments...