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Effect of storytelling on hopefulness in girl students

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND AND AIM: One of the methods that help students in learning critical thinking and decision-making skills is storytelling. Story helps the students to place themselves in the same situation as the main protagonist and try different ways and finally select and implement the best possible method. The goal of this study is to investigate the effect of storytelling on hopefulness of students, age 8–11 in Isfahan's 2nd ed. educational district.

METHODS: This is an applied, quasi-experimental study. The study population comprised of 34 randomly selected students attending one of the schools in Isfahan's 2nd ed. educational district. The data gathering tool was the standard Kazdin hopefulness scale ($\alpha = 0.72$) and data were gathered before and after 8 storytelling sessions for the intervention group. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and analytical (paired and independent *t*-test) with the help of SPSS Version 18 software.

RESULTS: The study's findings showed a significant difference in the average hopefulness score of students in study group in pre- and posttest ($P = 0.04$). Furthermore, independent *t*-test results showed a significant difference in hopefulness score of intervention and control ($P = 0.001$). The average hopefulness score of the control group after storytelling sessions was higher than that of the intervention and control.

CONCLUSION: The results show the effectiveness of storytelling as a method for improving hopefulness in students.

Keywords:

Hopefulness, Isfahan, storytelling, students

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Introduction

Hopefulness is one of the most basic motivations for living and advancement in the society. Hope is like a leverage that moves humans forward. Creating hope in people at an early age is necessary for the healthy survival of the society.^[1] In the event that the development of hopelessness in children makes them less motivated for the basic activities and their depression in consequence.

Unfortunately, hopelessness or hopefulness in children almost have been studied in association with physical conditions such as thalassemia or cancer and there are not many studies about them.

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Increasing hopefulness can be done using various methods, but the best methods for children include storytelling, music therapy, game therapy, painting therapy, plays, and similar methods. Storytelling is one of the best methods of consultation for children because it helps them deal with emotions, thoughts and behaviors that cannot be vocalized by them.^[2,3] One of the benefits of stories is facilitating the treatment of sick children and many stories have been used to this end. Stories provide materials and resources for deriving meanings, understanding and deep insights and greatly help in creating changes by providing the necessary frameworks.^[4]

Story therapy is one of the psychotherapy methods that can prepare children for facing

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loses, fears and anxieties along with other psychotherapy approaches such as analytical, cognitive, and behavioral approaches and can create hope, energy, and change using an indirect and attractive method.^[5] Storytelling is an inseparable part of the children's lives and one of the main methods of communication between children and their world. Therefore, one can enter the children's world using storytelling and direct them toward suitable therapy goals and facilitate their growth and motivations.

Story and storytelling are useful for various ends. The story creates a situation in which the child can sympathize with the protagonist and use his/her imagination to solve problems. Therefore, today storytelling is considered to be one of the most important supplementary therapy methods.

Many studies investigate the use of storytelling methods and their effects under various situations. The results of all these studies point to the importance of storytelling method. However, despite the importance of elementary school students, there are limited studies about the effects of storytelling on this age group. Most studies concentrate on children with mental disorders and problems, some of which is presented in the next section.

One of the most important uses of storytelling and story therapy is teaching of necessary concepts to children. Some researchers such as Sheybani *et al.* in their studies reported that using stories and narratives can teach children various skills such as social skills, problem-solving, psychological teachings, and violence and how to deal with them. Their results showed that teaching has a better productivity using these methods and those students accept the lessons without resistance.^[1-7]

One of the other uses of this method is reducing psychological and behavioral problems in children. As can be seen in studies by researchers such as Karimi Nasab, story therapy can help to reduce the signs of stress disorders, stubbornness-disobedience, aggression, and behavioral disorders in children. In general, it can be said that story therapy can be used to fix the intellectual disorders in children.^[8-11]

Storytelling can also be used in teaching language and solving language and speech disorders, increasing the vocabulary of the children and improve their performance in various tests and is one of the best methods for these ends according to many teachers and trainers. A study by Miller and Bourkan confirms these claims.^[12-16]

Story therapy can also show its usefulness in improving behavioral performance and improving personality

factors. Some studies such as the one by Yousefi Lavieh and Matin show the use of story therapy in improving ethical independence, improving social adaptation and improving the social behavior in children. With story therapy, it is possible to improve various personality and social aspects of children in various parts of their lives.^[17-19]

Story therapy can also help to reduce depression and hopefulness in children and teenagers. Various studies worldwide confirm this assumption. The results of these studies show that with story and narrative, it is possible to deeply affect the souls of children and teenagers and free them from tensions they face in their everyday lives. In fact, storytelling prepares children for facing various problems and shows them various solutions for their problems.^[20-23]

In a study among a group of South African primary school children, twelve learners aged 9–13 years participated in the study. Visual participatory approaches were applied for study using group discussion. The results revealed a strengthening of the children's hope on personal, relational, and collective levels from engaging in hope-oriented visual participatory processes.^[24] The findings are very similar to the current study about storytelling. Because it seems that discussion groups do the same role.

These background studies show that most previous studies concentrate on children with social problems and issues. Furthermore, the majority of studies have been carried out in the field of story therapy. Because tomorrow's society is made by today's students, in Iran very few studies have been conducted about improving the lives of a segment of society, especially using storytelling methods. Therefore, the main issue addressed in this study is to determine the effect of storytelling on hopefulness of students between age 8 and 11 that can have very important consequences for the lives and future of these children.

Methods

This study has an applied goal and uses quiz experimental (with two groups and pretest and posttest) method. The statistical population comprised of students between age 8 and 11 who studied in one of the schools in Isfahan's 2nd educational district. Given the facts that all students had to take part in the pretest and then similar groups of students needed to be selected and participate in several intervention sessions at the same time and day, data gathering were largely dependent on the cooperation of principal and other staff members of the school. After the necessary negotiations, Shahid Sameli girl elementary school in Isfahan's 2nd educational district

was selected for the study. This school had a total of 93 students, among which 58 students were considered for the study based on the statistics. Inclusion criteria were being girl, student of this school, consent to respond to the questionnaire (both the student and her parents' consent), having the ability to read and write. Exclusion criteria were students who did not want to respond to the questionnaire, those who had not the ability to read and write and the students who had more than 13 years. Hence, preschool, first grade and sixth-grade students were eliminated from the study. These students participated in a hopefulness test and then divided into three groups of weak, mediocre and strong based on their test scores. The first group, including 24 students with the best marks in the test, were eliminated and the remaining 34 students were selected as the study sample and were randomly placed in two 17-member intervention and control. All of the intervention group students participated in the study.

The data gathering tool was adapted from "Kazdin's children hopefulness scale"^[6] and includes 17 items and is suitable for children between 6 and 13 years old. Each item is answered as either true or false and then the test is corrected using a key. A score of 17 shows severe hopefulness in the participant. The psychometric quality of this test was confirmed by psychologist consultant and statistical consultant during a preliminary study, and content corrections were suggested. Based on these suggestions, two questions that created negative correlation and lowered the reliability of the questionnaire in relation to other questions and the overall content of the test were eliminated. Calculating the reliability of 18 item questionnaire using 15 members of the statistical population, showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.72.

The ethical considerations for the study included the following items: all participants entered the study knowingly and could refuse to continue at any time. All information gathered through the tests are confidential. The storytelling was carried out in 8, half hour sessions, not including information exchange before and after the sessions and in each session, one story was told to the children. Given the fact that participants in the study were in the age group of 8–11 years old, based on Piyajeh's theory about this age group, stories were selected so that covered objective and subjective thinking and had hopeful content based on the underlying reasoning of children. These short stories were chosen from Iranian and foreign novels and changed when necessary based on cultural norms and the necessary content for the objective of the study. Stories with related contents were selected with the help of storytelling expert of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults and psychology consultant. The storytelling was carried

out by the researcher that has previously undergone necessary trainings supervised by the story telling expert of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. The storytelling was done in their class rooms without the presence of their teacher. During storytelling sessions, various methods such as sound imitation and play acting, using tools related to the story, video screening, theatrical performances by the students and makeup were used. All participant information was confidential. Pretest was conducted 2–3 days before the first storytelling session. Storytelling sessions were carried out in groups, and 14 days after the last storytelling session, posttest was conducted. The name of stories used included "Lion and Mouse," "Tying the bell around cat's neck," "Aunt Cockroach (khaleh sooskeh)," "Locust and the ant," "Crow and Peacock," "Lovely Crow," "Three fishes in the pound" and "Fish and Fisherman."

The researcher asked the intervention group to not to tell anything about the stories and sessions for the control group. After the last session, in one of the school's events, a small gift was presented to all of the participants to increase the persistence of the results and to thank the participants for their cooperation.

The gathered data were analyzed using SPSS 18 statistical software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) using descriptive (average and standard deviation) and analytical (independent *t*-test for comparing the hopefulness score of students of intervention and control groups and paired *t*-test for comparing the scores before and after intervention) statistics. $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results

To ensure the correct age distribution of students in both groups, average was used. The findings showed that the average age of both intervention and control group is 9.5 years.

Table 1 shows the average hopefulness score of both intervention and control groups in pretest and posttest. As can be seen from the results, there is no significant difference between the average score of control and intervention groups in the pretest. The same results show a significant difference between the average score of control and study groups in posttest, with the average hopefulness score of control group being significantly higher.

Table 2 compares the hopefulness scores of pretest and posttest for intervention and control groups. Based on the paired *t*-test results, there was a significant difference between the average pretest and posttest scores of the

Table 1: Comparison between average hopefulness test scores of intervention and control groups in pretest and posttest

| Group | Average | SD | t-test |
|----------|---------|------|--------|
| Pretest | | | |
| Study | 3.58 | 2.06 | 0.45 |
| Control | 4.05 | 1.56 | 0.75 |
| Posttest | | | |
| Study | 2.41 | 1.41 | 0.001 |
| Control | 5.05 | 1.56 | 5.17 |

SD=Standard deviation

Table 2: Comparison between average hopefulness score of pretest and posttest for study and control groups

| Group | Average | SD | t-test |
|----------|---------|------|--------|
| Study | | | |
| Pretest | 3.59 | 2.06 | 0.04 |
| Posttest | 2.41 | 1.41 | 2.21 |
| Control | | | |
| Pretest | 4.06 | 1.56 | 0.13 |
| Posttest | 5.06 | 1.56 | 1.57 |

SD=Standard deviation

intervention group with the hopefulness score showing a significant decrease in the posttest. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the average score of the control group in pre- and post-test.

Discussion

The goal of this study is to investigate the effect of storytelling on hopefulness of students, age 8–11 in Isfahan’s 2nd educational district. Storytelling is an incredible method for improving oral and practical understanding and contains representations of self, outside world and different characters that interact with each other and therefore have predefined relationships. In fact, stories create opportunities for self-emergence and learning and improve understanding and effectiveness in interpersonal relations.^[1] Therefore, the goal of this study was to investigate the effects of storytelling on hopefulness of students between 8 and 11 in Isfahan’s 2nd educational district. The findings of this study showed that storytelling has a positive effect in increasing hopefulness in the students which is similar to the results reported in previous studies.^[2,4,8,17-21] As mentioned in the research findings, there is a significant difference between the average hopefulness scores of students in intervention group in pretest and posttest which is similar to the results reported by Sanaatnagar *et al.*^[4] who showed that story therapy is effective in reducing hopefulness and loneliness in girls living in family-like facilities. In this study, it seems that group story telling had created an opportunity for students to think about their future and ways for reaching their goals, improve Self Knowledge, Self-acceptance, and

receive positive feedback from other group members and consider themselves effective in reaching their goals. In the study by Kharimi Nasab^[8] the results show the positive effect of storytelling on reducing the depression of children suffering from cancer. Avivit and Naydene explored in their study entitled “ I want to be a hope champion,” how visual participatory research-as-intervention enabled a strengthening of hope among a group of South African primary school children aged 9–13 years from a rural village in South Africa. Analysis of the data revealed a strengthening of the children’s hope on personal, relational, and collective levels from engaging in hope-oriented visual participatory processes.^[24] Findings of their study are similar to findings of current study after storytelling. All the researches show a significant reduction in depression and irritation of children after storytelling sessions. It seems that the children had managed to change their outlook toward their challenges by connecting their current and future lives and consider the current challenges as a preparation for the future. Stories, have broad applications. Training and recognition of the truth, the better way of life, morals and the ways to achieve perfection and success, as well as improving the attitude and acceptance of existing conditions of life, a sense of security and confidence, increased life expectancy. stories facilitate the relationship between children and the environment and they are hope-enhancing.

In general, story and narrative can be used to teach the truth, correct lifestyles, ethics and ways of reaching fulfilment and success, improving the outlook toward life, creating the feeling of security and self-confidence, improvizing hopefulness, and easing the relation between children and their environment. Stories tell us how to live in this world and provide us with opportunities to change our outlook about reality. In other words, stories can change people’s beliefs about themselves.^[1] The results of the current study improve our understanding about the needs of the children and show that using methods such as storytelling is possible to teach concepts necessary for a successful life to children.

Conclusion

The results of this study can be the basis of future similar studies and result in improving the quality of the students’ life. Some of the limitations of this study included selection of area, normalization and gaining the attention of children and encouraging them to participate in the study. Students in intervention group have been told to not to speak about the stories for control group, but it can be a kind of limitation if they have said to them. Given the results of this study, conducting similar workshops and other creative sessions in

various schools and learning centers is a suitable suggestion for improving the quality of education and social characteristics of the students. This author suggests that other researchers use similar methods such as art-therapy, painting therapy, music therapy, sport therapy, game therapy, and creative plays and investigate their effects on factors such as social behavior, ethical characteristics, personality and group traits of children, and their ability for dealing with everyday problems. It is also suggested for a simultaneous teaching intervention to be carried out along with storytelling to coordinate the feedbacks of storytelling, living, and study environments. Furthermore, similar studies can be done for different students, for example, boys or other students of age ranges.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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