

Running head: PHENOMENOLOGY OF BIBLIOTHERAPY

"Phenomenology of Bibliotherapy in Modifying Teacher Punitiveness "

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Abstract

This study examined the phenomenology of bibliotherapy and its effects in changing preservice teachers' punitive attitudes toward children. Subjects (n = 29) were enrolled in a university course, Introduction to Emotional Disturbance. Five books by Torey Hayden, autobiographical accounts of teaching and building relationships with troubled students, were read and discussed within the mechanics of group bibliotherapy. Subjects completed a self-report rating form measuring their tendency toward punitiveness during the first and last weeks of the 15 week semester. Subjects also completed a questionnaire measuring the bibliotherapeutic impact of reading Hayden's texts and journaled about the experience of reading Hayden. Comparison of the group's pre and post measures on punitiveness showed a small, albeit significant decrease in punitiveness, and decreased punitiveness was associated with the therapeutic impact of reading Hayden. Phenomenological analysis of the students' journal entries revealed the structure of the experience of reading Hayden was one of identification with the protagonist leading to emotional and cognitive learnings.

"Phenomenology of Bibliotherapy in Modifying Teacher Punitiveness"

Bibliotherapy arose from the concept that reading could affect an individual's attitude and behavior and is thus an important influence in shaping, molding, and altering values. Shrodes (1950), VanTichelt (1977), Colaizzi (1978), and Cohen (1994) did theory building research related to bibliotherapy. Shrodes (1950) described the healing pathway of bibliotherapy as moving from identification, through catharsis, to the development of insight. VanTichelt (1977) reported two types of response to reading--"like being there" and "like hearing"--and concluded that imagery and identification with the protagonist were critical variables. Colaizzi (1978) did a phenomenological study of the experience of having read something that has such an effect that the reader has an existential change. His research supports the work of Shrodes (1950), as Colaizzi found concepts similar to identification and insight to be vital. In a qualitative study, Cohen (1994) reported the structure of the experience of therapeutic reading was recognition of self evolving into ways of feeling and knowing. Cohen's research supports and expands the work of Shrodes (1950), VanTichelt (1977), and Colaizzi (1978), particularly because the concept similar to identification--recognition of self--emerged as vital to the experience of therapeutic reading.

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenology of bibliotherapy and its effects on preservice teachers' tendency toward punitiveness. This tendency, it is presumed, will influence the teacher's approach to discipline and additionally impact upon the classroom climate.

Method

Subjects

Students in the experiment (n = 29) were enrolled in a teacher education course, "Introduction to Emotional Disturbance." This two-semester-credit-hour course is a prerequisite for all undergraduate majors in special education at Appalachian State

University. The course provides the conceptual basis for the education of children with emotional and behavioral problems and is designed to examine issues in teaching and treatment.

The mean age of the experimental group was 20.8 years, and there were two males. The mean number of years in college was 3.4. Two subjects were currently teaching in the public schools. All subjects identified themselves as Caucasian. The senior author taught the course and had 18 years of university teaching experience.

Treatment

Course texts were five nonfiction books by Torey Hayden: One Child (1980), Somebody Else's Kids (1982), Murphy's Boy (1983), Ghost Girl (1992), and Tiger Child (1995), the sequel to One Child. Hayden's books are autobiographical accounts of teaching and building positive relationships with children whose lives are marked by mental illness, learning disabilities, delinquency, anger, and defeat. Each book mirrors the synergistic power of relationships between a teacher and her students. As Hayden wrote of Sheila, a silent troubled girl who had been abandoned by her mother and abused by her father "this little girl had a profound effect on me. Her courage, her resilience, and her inadvertent ability to express that great gaping need to be loved that we all feel--in short--her humanness brought me into contact with my own" (1995, p. 8). Hayden's books are a heartfelt testament that living with and loving other human beings who return that love is the most strengthening and salubrious emotional experience in the world.

Hayden portrays the loving relationship not as an affect, but as an action-a process of giving, not a feeling. She gives of herself: of her interest, her joy, her understanding, her knowledge, her humor, her sadness. In giving she enriches the lives of her children, and that which she brings to life in her children is given back to her. In One Child Hayden reads the fable The Little Prince to Sheila, and afterwards they discuss the part where the

little prince tames the fox:

"Why you do this?" she asked.

"Do what Sheil?"

"Tame me."

I did not know what to say.

Her water blue eyes rose to me. "Why you care: I can't never figure that out. Why you want to tame me?"

"Well, kiddo, I don't have a good reason, I guess. It just seemed like the thing to do."

"Do it be like the fox? Do I be special now cause you tame me? Do I be a special girl?"

I smiled. "Yeah you're my special girl. It's like the fox says, now that I made you my

friend, you're unique in all the world. I guess I always wanted you for my special girl. I guess that's why I tamed you to begin with."

"Do you love me?"

I nodded.

"I love you too. You be my special best person in the whole world" (1980, pp. 104- 105).

Hayden's students receive an abundance of love and affection, whether they deserve it or not. "Tax-free" nurturance is a given, no matter how hard some try to make themselves repugnant. She never uses affection as a bargaining chip in teaching her children. Hayden knows that withdrawal of love may well establish short term control, but for the children she teaches, love is their primary unmet need.

Hayden is careful not to be lured into counteraggression with her difficult students.

While Tomaso's constant testing of the limits and deep rage were difficult to contend with, I found these nothing compared with some of his other behaviors. The kid quickly figured out that destructiveness and violence were not going to make me lose my composure. But they were not the only tricks up his sleeve. One of his most effective weapons was his ability to pass wind. To me it seemed he could do it at any time he chose and at any decibel level. Up on one buttock he would rise and aim so that his victim received the full benefit of the smell and the sound. "It must have been the beans I ate," he would always say sweetly. My gosh, the kid had to be eating beans morning, noon, and night to accomplish what

he

was capable of. I am sure that if sheet music were available, he could have farted the Star Spangled Banner. The crowning touch involved pulling his pants out in back and sticking a hand down to feel. God only knows what he was checking. I never asked. In fact, I tried my best to ignore the whole business. For that kind of

behavior, inattention seemed the soundest recourse (1982, pp. 86-87).

Hayden's response pattern to classroom management is nonauthoritarian. In each of her classrooms there are only two rules: "try your best" and "do not hurt anyone." Recognizing children's need to be independent and free, she is not preoccupied with obedience and "teacher power." She prefers to manage behavior without the use of consequences and punishment. Hayden has no need to triumph over her children, to show them who's boss, which in reality would undermine her influence. Instead, she focuses her efforts on mapping out structure and values and demanding mature, responsible behavior.

I found establishing a structure a useful and productive method with all the children because it decreased the fuzziness of our relationship. Obviously, they had already shown they could not handle their own limits without help, or they never would have arrived in my class to begin with. As soon as the time came that they could, I began the process of transferring the power to them (1980, p. 24).

The Hayden texts were selected according to the six major principles of bibliotherapy material selection (Jalongo, 1983). First, readers (preservice teachers in special education) can readily identify with the plot, setting, dialogue, and the characters in her books. Hayden is a youthful teacher who faces the dilemmas of being youthful. Two, her books use correct terminology, psychologically sound explanations, and portray events accurately. Three, the origins of emotional reactions in Hayden and her children are revealed and inspected. Fourth, her books reflect an appreciation for individual differences. Five, excellent coping strategies are modeled, and six, crises are presented in an optimistic, surmountable fashion.

The five Hayden texts served as the primary source for class lectures and discussions, and the teacher-student encounters in the texts served as springboards for inquiry and critique of theory and practice in the education of children with emotional and behavioral disorders. Additional course readings were 12 journal articles and book

chapters addressing the following topics in emotional and behavioral disorders:

screening,

identification, and diagnosis; social, learning, and behavioral characteristics; etiological influences; conceptual models; intervention strategies; and educational and organizational approaches. Information from these readings was discussed in relation to characters and events in Hayden's books, for example, (1) "Does Sheila meet the IDEA definition of emotionally/behaviorally handicapped?" and (2) "Brendtro and others describe the circle of courage needs of troubled children. How does Torey address these needs in her classroom?"

Assignments included the writing of response papers, three to five pages in length, on each of the five Hayden texts where students responded to specific questions (e.g., (1) "Fritz Redl listed five strategies for intervening with problem behaviors: changing, managing, tolerating, accommodating, and preventing. Which strategies did Torey use in handling the goldfish incident with Sheila? Do you agree or disagree with her actions? Explain." and (2) "Torey found herself in a dilemma when Mr. Collins ordered her to witness Sheila's paddling. What was Torey's dilemma and what were her choices? How was the dilemma solved? Do you think the right decision was made? How would you have solved the problem? How could the dilemma be avoided in the future?") Response questions lead the students from literal recall of information through interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

In class discussions of the books and response papers followed a six-step procedure:

1. retell the material, highlighting feelings, characters, and situations relevant to the problem being discussed;
2. probe events from the story to facilitate a shift in feeling and relationship, making identification more easy and vivid;
3. stimulate the group to identify similar situations in real life or from other books to lend validity to the idea that books can extend actual experience;

4. provide an opportunity for the group to explore the consequences of certain behaviors or feelings and recapitulate what happened as a result of these feelings or actions;

5. provide an opportunity for the group to draw conclusions or generalizations as to whether specific actions in certain situations had positive or negative effects; and

6. provide an opportunity for the group to determine the desirability or effectiveness of several actions in the specific situation.

Survey of Attitudes Toward Children

The Survey of Attitudes Toward Children (SATC) is a 27 item, five alternative self-report scale which includes items that were generated from the literature on authoritarianism, corporal punishment, and child advocacy (Hyman, 1997). The scale is intended to discern individuals who hold punitive attitudes toward behavior management in the classroom. Standardized on a sample of 608 professionals, including teachers, psychologists, social workers, and administrators, the range of scores was 31 to 112 with a mean of 65.07 and a standard deviation of 16.42. A score between 48 and 81 falls within the average 68 percent of people tested. The lowest possible (least punitive) score is 27, and the highest possible (most punitive) score is 135.

Of the 27 items, 13 items are stated in a positive direction, and 14 items are stated in a negative direction. The respondent was instructed to place his/her responses on an attitude continuum for each item by coding one position on a five-point rating system: strongly agree, mildly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mildly disagree, and strongly disagree. The categories were scored by assigning values of one, two, three, four, or five for items expressing unfavorable attitudes toward punitiveness and in the reverse order for items expressing favorable attitudes. These scores were then added to obtain a total score for each respondent. The higher the score, the more favorable attitudes one held toward the use of punitiveness.

The SATC was administered during the first and last class meetings of the 15 week semester. Distributed surveys were coded with an identification number. The master sheet with all identification numbers was kept confidential. All responses were maintained in strictest confidence.

The SATC is a reliable and valid instrument. Test-retest correlation and coefficient alpha statistics are high, acceptable, and statistically significant, and the instrument has good construct validity (Kotzen, 1994).

Bibliotherapeutic Checklist

A researcher-made questionnaire, the Bibliotherapeutic Checklist (BC) (Marlowe & Maycock, 1998) was developed from Cohen's phenomenological study of readers' experience of bibliotherapy (1994). Cohen described the experience of therapeutic reading as recognition of self evolving to ways of feeling and ways of knowing.

Regarding recognition of self, the experience of therapeutic reading emerged from participants in Cohen's study recognizing themselves in literary characters. All of the other elements seemed to flow from this central aspect of the experience. Recognition of self was a type of identification, a shock of recognition, a sense of complete oneness with literary characters. This affiliation led to expressions of affect and homonymy toward literary characters and concern for their fate.

Regarding ways of feeling, recognizing themselves in what they read gave participants a feeling of shared experience, of not being alone with their difficulties, and validation, or a sanctioning of readers' experiences. Comfort, hope, and inspiration were all positive feelings that appeared to be somewhat interrelated, giving participants feelings of reassurance, reasons to hope, and motivation through reading. Therapeutic reading also provided a feeling of release or relief for readers. They described a feeling of catharsis, feeling cleansed or as if burdens had been lifted from their shoulders. A sense of sadness, of pent up-pain was released through reading and resulted in a lightening of their being, a sense of joy.

Regarding ways of knowing, participants reported gaining some type of understanding from their reading. This included insight, bringing feelings and ideas to the surface, and clarifying and crystallizing ideas and feelings. Reading helped them understand themselves, their situations, and situations of others. Participants also used reading in the time-honored way to gain information. Therapeutic reading educated participants, gave them advice, guidance, and suggestions on how to deal with a situation, and increased confidence in their abilities to make decisions.

Using Cohen's results, the BC--a 20 item, seven alternative Likert-type rating scale--was developed, comprised of three subscales: self-recognition, ways of feeling, and ways of knowing. Four items measured self-recognition (affection toward main character, agreement with character's opinions, concern for character's fate, and pleasure in being like the character); eight items measured ways of feeling (shared experience, validation, comfort, hope, inspiration, sadness, tension release, and joy), and eight items measured ways of knowing (self understanding, awareness of one's own motivations, understanding of others, acceptance of others, gaining didactic information, clarifying and crystallizing ideas, incorporation of new values, and insight).

The respondent was instructed to place his/her responses on an attitude continuum indicating the degree to which each of the 20 bibliotherapeutic elements in reading Torey Hayden were experienced. Respondents coded one position on a seven-point rating scale with one representing low and seven representing high. The lowest possible (least therapeutic) total scale score was 20, and the highest possible (most therapeutic) total scale score was 140.

The BC was administered during the last class meeting of the 15 week semester. Distributed surveys were coded with an identification number. The master sheet with all

identification numbers was kept confidential. All responses were maintained in strictest confidence.

The BC is a reliable instrument. Test-retest correlation and coefficient alpha statistics are high, acceptable, and statistically significant (Marlowe, 1998).

Analyzing the Experience of Reading Torey Hayden

Students were required to keep a weekly journal for the class, where they reflected on course readings, discussions, and activities. For the week twelve journal entry, students were asked to respond in writing to the following open ended questions: (1) "How has reading Torey Hayden this semester helped in preparing you to teach children with emotional and behavioral disorders?" (2) "How has this reading experience been different from other teacher education reading experiences?" Minimum response was 250 words addressing each question. Data were analyzed using the Colaizzi (1978) phenomenological method. This method consists of six steps: dwelling with the data, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings into clusters or themes, creating an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, and reducing the description to a statement of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the criteria for rigor in qualitative research are to be expressed as trustworthiness and are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Conclusions of the researcher are credible if they express the realities expressed by the participants. In lieu of generalizability, the reader of qualitative research looks to see if results are in any way transferable to a similar context, or if they can identify with findings. Dependability implies relative replicability, because a basic assumption of qualitative research is that a particular reality is true at one point in time, for one particular set of participants. Confirmability refers to whether another researcher would arrive at a similar understanding or conclusion looking at the data.

Techniques used to meet criteria for trustworthiness were (1) peer debriefing, in which coding schemes were examined by a professor of teacher education; (2) member

checks, in which students were asked to validate emerging themes; (3) search for negative cases, by which the data were scrutinized for elements that did not fit the emerging pattern; and (4) audit by a professor of teacher education to check for adherence to criteria for trustworthiness.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest scores on the SATC are presented in Table 1. The posttest mean of 58.89 (standard deviation = 14.97) was lower than the

Insert Table 1 about here

pretest mean of 65.52 (standard deviation = 13.79), representing a decrease of 6.73 in punitiveness. A nonindependent t-test revealed that the group's posttest mean was significantly lower than the pretest mean ($t = 4.52$, $df = 28$, $p < .0001$). Both pretest and posttest means fell within the average range of punitiveness (48-81), with individual score ranges of 44 - 89 at pretest and 33 - 86 at posttest.

Descriptive statistics for scores on the BC are presented in Table 2. The total scale mean score was 118.96 with a standard deviation of 12.53; the total scale score range was 93 - 135.

Insert Table 2 about here

Pearson product correlations were used to examine the relationship between pretest-posttest change in SATC total scores and scores on the BC. Decreased scores in punitiveness correlated positively and significantly with BC total scale score ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). The subscales measuring self-recognition, ways of feeling, and ways of knowing, also correlated positively and significantly with decreased punitiveness, $r = .72$, $p < .001$, $r = .59$, $p < .001$, and $r = .51$, $p < .01$, respectively. Pearson product correlations were also used to examine the relationship between the BC subscales. Self-recognition

correlated positively and significantly with ways of feeling ($r = .86, p < .001$) and ways of knowing ($r = .69, p < .001$), and ways of feeling correlated positively and significantly with ways of knowing ($r = .84, p < .001$).

The structure of the experience of reading Torey Hayden was one of identification with the protagonist leading to emotional and cognitive learnings. Identification took the form of admiration (several students referred to Torey as their new heroine), a tendency to imitate, and a sense of loyalty and belongingness. Hayden's books were enthusiastically accepted and preferred over traditional textbooks. Regarding emotional learnings, students reported overcoming feelings of isolation and anxiety about teaching, of now "being a member of the Torey Hayden fan club." Overcoming isolation flowed into a sense of validation ("I now know it's okay to belong to the better to have loved and lost school of thought"), of hope for their teaching future in special education, and of inspiration ("I am now determined to teach children with emotional problems"). Catharsis was also a prominent theme ("I cried and jumped for joy throughout the book;" "Emotionally, I felt as if I was being peeled like an onion, layer by layer"). Cognitive learnings took the form of increased understanding of one's own motivations in teaching children, of one's teaching strengths and limitations, of increased understanding and acceptance of children with emotional difficulties, and of gaining didactic information and tools in teaching troubled children. Cognitive and emotional learnings tended to overlap as understanding and gaining didactic information led to validation, hope, and inspiration.

Discussion

The findings show that bibliotherapy may have a small, albeit statistically significant effect on preservice teachers' ratings of their punitiveness toward children. Subjects' SATC scores were significantly lower at posttest (approximately 11%), and BC total scale and the three subscale scores all correlated positively with decreased punitiveness. Agreement exists, though, that attitudes and behavior are not associated (Altemeyer,

1988), and these findings should be viewed accordingly. Similarly, changes in self-reports of attitudes are not necessarily real changes in attitudes.

Recognition of self in Hayden's character, a model of caring and democratic attitudes, had the strongest relationship to lowered punitiveness. This finding supports the views of Shrodes (1950), VanTichelt (1977), Colaizzi (1978) and Cohen (1994) that readers recognizing themselves in literary characters is vital to the experience of bibliotherapy and its goals.

Recognition of self correlated with ways of feeling and ways of knowing, and ways of feeling correlated with ways of knowing. The multicollinearity of the three subscales lends support to the healing pathway of bibliotherapy as described by Shrodes (1950), Cohen (1994), and others.

Identification with Hayden or self-recognition was also a basic element in the students' journal entries. Recognition of self was a highly personal identification process, and the depth of self-recognition seemed related to the depth of emotional and cognitive learnings.

Results of this study suggest a framework for practice of bibliotherapy. Because recognition of self was key to the experience of therapeutic reading, literature should be selected with an eye for details that encourage maximum reader recognition of self. Discussion would then guide the reader through other aspects of the experience, such as shared experience, validation, comfort, understanding, or hope.

Results of this study open the door for further exploration of bibliotherapy as a therapeutic strategy with different populations. Assumptions of its effectiveness with a variety of readers pervade; however empirical evaluations are scarce. Carefully planned quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to evaluate the contribution of bibliotherapy as a therapeutic change agent.

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Table 1

Group Pre and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations: Survey of Attitudes TowardChildren (Range 1-5)

	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD
Physical punishment should not be allowed in the schools.	2.6	1.0	2.1	1.1
A child should never tell an adult that he or she is wrong.	2.5	0.6	2.2	0.8
Corporal punishment is just and necessary.	2.7	0.9	2.0	0.8
Children are not being allowed enough freedom today.	2.4	0.5	2.2	0.6
Corporal punishment is an effective deterrent to school discipline problems	2.3	0.5	2.2	0.6
Corporal punishment is absolutely never justified.	2.3	0.8	2.2	0.8
Children have no moral obligation to remain loyal to their parents no matter what the circumstances.	2.5	0.9	2.3	0.7
Someone in the schools should be given the opportunity to punish children by paddling.	2.3	0.7	2.1	0.9
Training in adherence to authority of teachers hinders the development of self reliance in children.	2.4	0.8	2.2	0.6
You can't change human nature.	2.3	0.9	2.0	0.8
Scaring a student, now and then, by a promise of a whipping is likely to have negative emotional consequences.	2.3	0.6	2.2	0.6
Loyalty on the part of children to their parents is something that parents should earn.	2.5	0.6	2.1	0.6
Physical punishment is an effective way to control student behavior.	2.4	0.6	2.3	0.8

Table 1 (continued)

	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD
Corporal punishment should be used frequently as a method of discipline.	2.3	0.9	2.0	0.7
Children "owe" their parents a great deal.	2.3	0.6	2.1	0.6
Children are the constitutional equivalents of adults, and thus should be accorded the same rights.	2.3	0.6	2.3	0.6
If you spare the rod, you will spoil the child.	2.2	0.8	2.2	0.8
Children in school have to earn their rights.	2.3	0.8	2.1	0.7
Because paddling and spanking may have negative consequences, we should discontinue the practice	2.3	0.7	2.2	0.6
If a child acts mean, he or she needs punishment rather than understanding	2.7	0.7	2.2	0.7
A young child's thoughts and ideas are his or her own business.	2.2	0.5	2.1	0.6
Corporal punishment is not necessary in modern education	2.4	0.6	2.1	0.6
Children should have the opportunity to evaluate the educational materials they will be using in the schools.	2.3	0.7	2.2	0.8
Because corporal punishment has not eliminated school disciplinary problems, society should abolish it.	2.7	0.8	2.1	0.6
Because teachers act "in loco parentis" (in place of parents), they should be permitted to physically punish a student	2.3	0.7	2.2	0.7
Children should be grateful to their parents.	2.4	0.7	2.1	0.8
When teachers hit students as punishment, they teach them that "might makes right."	2.3	0.7	1.8	1.0

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Bibliotherapeutic Checklist (Range 1-7)

	M	SD
Self-recognition subscale		
Affection toward main character	6.0	0.8
Agreement with character's opinions	5.7	0.7
Concern for character's fate	5.7	0.8
Pleasure in being like character	5.7	0.9
Ways of feeling subscale		
Shared experience	5.7	0.8
Validation	5.5	0.8
Comfort	5.7	0.7
Hope	5.8	0.8
Inspiration	6.2	0.8
Sadness	6.0	0.8
Tension release	5.5	0.9
Joy	6.1	0.8
Ways of knowing subscale		
Self-understanding	6.0	0.6
Awareness of one's own motivations	6.0	0.8
Understanding of others	6.0	0.6
Acceptance of others	6.0	0.7
Gaining didactic information	6.0	0.5
Clarifying and crystallizing ideas	5.8	0.7
Incorporation of new values	6.0	0.7
Insight	6.1	0.7