

THERAPEUTIC STORYTELLING IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE HOLLY: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: This case study illustrates the use of therapeutic storytelling as an effective intervention for helping children and youth to deal with various types of trauma and, in this case, trauma resulting from a phobic reaction. The article includes a brief introduction, a perusal of the literature and outlines some implications of therapeutic storytelling for the field of child and youth care. The therapeutic storytelling treatment process is presented here session by session to give the child and youth worker an appreciation of how each session is planned built on and interrelated with other sessions, and how to integrate the techniques employed for maximum effect.

Storytelling has been part of the child and youth worker (CYW) repertoire of skills since the beginnings of the profession. Therapeutic storytelling conforms to basic child and youth work principles: it relies on a positive relationship between child and adult (Fewester, 1990; Krueger, 1999; Maier, 1979; Triesman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969); it alters and responds to the therapeutic milieu (Bettelheim, 1950; Krueger, 1980; Redl & Wineman, 1957; Triesman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969) and it is planned and delivered as a therapeutic activity (Redl & Wineman, 1957; Triesman, Whittaker, & Brendtro, 1969). Therapeutic storytelling provides CYWs with a means of therapeutic intervention that complements their basic training, one that adapts itself to most child and youth care environments, and one that matches the developmental stages of children and youth. It is a therapeutic activity that attempts to use the underlying, as well as the overt, messages contained within a story to teach, encourage, and suggest solutions that children and youth may utilize as a way of dealing with their presenting problem(s). Storytelling is used for a multitude of purposes in child and youth care. It can entertain, build rapport, create intimacy, alter moods, build self-esteem, desensitize, release emotions, teach concepts, communicate indirectly, redefine problems, provide alternatives and solutions to problems, and stimulate the unconscious mind to search for novel solutions to problems (Burns, 1993). Therapeutic stories are non-threatening, engage the conscious and unconscious mind, foster independence, bypass resistance, model flexibility, make ideas more memorable, mobilize unconscious resources, mirror the child's reality, and are developmentally appropriate (Burns, 2000). The style of therapeutic storytelling described here encourages the CYW to use stories to assist children and youth in coping with and, in many cases, eliminating symptoms and reactions to traumatic experiences.

Literature Review

The use of therapeutic storytelling is well documented in the psychological literature as a viable form of therapeutic intervention (Bettelheim, 1975; Erickson, 1979; Freud, 1913; Gardner, 1971; Jung, 1959; May, 1991; von Franz, 1970; Wallach, 1989). In the past two decades three writers in the field of child and youth work have written about its therapeutic value: Peterson 1989, Peterson and Fontana 1991, and this author, Burns 1982, 1993, 1999, & 2000. Peterson (1989) presents a 7-stage collaborative metaphor technique for working with children and youth along with two other forms of metaphorical interventions. Peterson and Fontana (1991) encourage the CYW to use metaphors, storytelling, simile, anecdotes and analogues to assist disturbed children and youth. I, personally, have been using therapeutic storytelling for treating children and youth experiencing a variety of traumatic responses with much success since 1984.

Implications for Child and Youth Work

The implications of therapeutic storytelling for the CYW are numerous. Storytelling is well adapted to both residential and outpatient settings and therefore can be integrated into therapeutic programming easily and inexpensively. It works as well in a hospital setting as it does in a detention centre. Therapeutic storytelling can provide the CYW with a strategy to deal with powerful and difficult to manage emotions that, when discussed directly, might otherwise re-traumatize the child or youth. Wallach (1989), in her chapter on play and storytelling, writes, "Storytelling allows children to distance themselves from frightening or unacceptable emotions...." (p.62). The type of treatment intervention used in this case example allows the CYW to work with the child or youth intensively but for a relatively short period of time and therefore works well for child and youth care settings where time is a restrictive factor.

Therapeutic storytelling can also be a useful treatment intervention for the CYW who may have limited exposure to the child or youth. For example, night staff or relief staff in a group home, hospital, or residential setting can use therapeutic storytelling to develop rapport and influence behaviour. Storytelling can also be effective for the CYW who may be working with the child or youth in conjunction with other health care professionals. The CYW, in a psychiatric setting, who is aware of the child's or youth's goals and treatment plan can introduce stories that complement and enhance the therapeutic process. Storytelling can also be used by the CYW in conjunction with other forms of interventions to assist and augment the treatment process. In the case example presented here I used art and later drama as a secondary form of expression for the child to make the process more memorable. Music, drama, mime, play and other therapeutic activities can be combined with storytelling to enrich therapeutic programs designed to assist children and youth with behavioural and emotional problems.

To date there has been no research in the area of storytelling by CYWs. Research could assist the CYW in determining what stories work best with specific age groupings, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic groups, gender, types of problems and treatment environments. Research and continued practice in the area of therapeutic storytelling would be useful in furthering and promoting the use of therapeutic storytelling in the field as well as possibly providing the CYW with more efficient and meaningful ways of using this powerful tool in the therapeutic milieu.

Finally, articles, papers, and books discussing therapeutic storytelling and its uses in the field of child and youth work need to be written by CYWs to further expand and improve upon its use within the field. Such materials, specific to the discipline, assist the CYW in using therapeutic storytelling as a change agent in the treatment of troubled children and youth. The following is a case study of one way of using therapeutic storytelling to deal with a serious and debilitating problem experienced by a young child.

HOLLY: A CASE STUDY

Introduction

A female child six years of age was referred to a children's mental health agency, in Southwestern Ontario, due to what her parent's described as a "crippling fear of storms." Parents called the centre hoping that forms of treatment other than medication (suggested by their physician) might be available. The intake worker described them as an emotionally solid family of six children and two adults. The identified child was not experiencing any problems other than her phobic reaction to storms. She appeared to be functioning at age appropriate levels in all areas of development. Both parents, who were professional educators, stated that they had tried everything they knew to help their daughter deal with her fear of storms but the problem had become worse. They felt that they needed some professional assistance, before the spring storm season, to avoid any further trauma to their daughter. The child's severe reaction to storms had begun the previous April and had continued throughout the year.

I was given this case and felt that it would be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of therapeutic storytelling in treating traumatized children. The case was unique due to its simplicity: one symptom that was easily observable and a healthy family background with no previous history of emotional or developmental problems. Therapeutic storytelling would be the only new variable. I also felt that the severity of the problem and its complexity would provide an appropriate challenge to demonstrate the effectiveness of therapeutic storytelling.

I planned to use a standard treatment program that I had developed which consisted of six sessions. The initial three sessions, entitled the Assessment Phase, are focused on the assessment of the problem from the

child's and the parents' perspectives, information gathering about the child and the problem, rapport building with parents and child, and preparing the child for the therapeutic storytelling experience. The final three sessions, entitled the Treatment Phase, contain the main thrust of the therapeutic storytelling intervention. I chose to time this phase of Holly's treatment with the beginning of the thunderstorm season in Ontario (April-May). The goals and session summaries for this six-session therapeutic storytelling intervention illustrate the planning and intervention strategies I used for this particular child.

ASSESSMENT PHASE

The First Session

Goals for Session One

- a Determine if I am the appropriate therapist for this child and her parents.
- b Meet with Holly and her parents to establish initial rapport.
- c Further assess Holly's developmental state of health and that of her parents and family.
- d Obtain a detailed history of Holly's phobic reactions.
- e Try to determine any external source or trigger for the phobic reaction.
- f Begin the therapeutic process.

Session One

I began by meeting with Holly's parents Pat and Sue while Holly was playing in the playroom with another staff member. They presented as two concerned parents who were perplexed by the notion that their daughter should have such a severe reaction to the weather. They described Holly's behaviour as fearful when it was lightly raining or threatening rain. She would not go outside during these times for fear of being caught out in the rain. She also insisted on carrying an umbrella with her to school or when away from home regardless of the weather. She had missed a number of days of school and extracurricular activities last year because of her fear of storms. Her parents described Holly's reaction to thunderstorms as one of intense fear in which she would tremble, scream and weep. She could not be consoled until the storm had subsided. They described the nighttime storms as the most difficult for everyone. She would become hysterical and would have to be in bed with her parents or siblings. She would not go to sleep during any storms and parents were often awakened in the middle of the night by her if a storm occurred. Holly's father mentioned that she dreaded hailstorms most of all. They stated that the problem had slowly worsened over the summer season and that the children's nanny (who had helped to raise all six children) also had a phobic reaction to storms.

I explained to the parents that children at this age and developmental stage usually have a number of intense fears but that Holly's reaction was outside the range of what would be considered normal. I told them that I thought they were wise in bringing their daughter to the centre for help, that they could expect the treatment to be successful and that it would take from six to nine one hour sessions to be complete.

I had excluded Holly from this part of the assessment process so that I could have an open and frank discussion with her parents without further traumatizing Holly or causing her discomfort of any kind regarding her time at the centre.

I then saw Holly with her parents present as a way of aligning myself with her mother and father as well as giving her access to their support and comfort. She presented as an intelligent and somewhat shy little girl. She was reluctant to answer any of my questions and looked to her parents before responding. At the end of our fifteen-minute session, which consisted of showing Holly the playroom where we would be working, I gave her an art book and requested that she draw some pictures for me sometime during the week before I saw her again. When I asked her if she would return the following week she was a little reluctant to answer but, after much coaxing from her parents, agreed.

The Second Session

Goals for Session Two

- a Holly's shy nature and reluctance to return to therapy was a clear message that rapport and trust would be of primary importance to the success of her therapy. I asked whoever was bringing Holly to her first full session to wait in the waiting room downstairs for the entire session. I decided to keep the door to the playroom open even though it might prove to be distracting and asked the female staff member who was with Holly during her first visit to walk by the open door periodically to make her presence known to Holly. I felt that these interventions would assist in increasing Holly's level of comfort with the treatment setting.
- b I decided to keep the conversation non-threatening and focused on her likes and dislikes. I felt that this would help gather high interest material for story writing and also determine if she had any other fears or concerns that might be contributing to her fear of storms.
- c I wished to establish verbal and visual cues for relaxation and therefore paid particular attention to the content of discussion in the interview when Holly appeared to be relaxed. I would later use these topics as cues to enhance her relaxed state in future sessions.
- d I wanted to introduce Holly to specific states of mind that would assist her in the therapeutic process. I chose a technique I have termed "the parts metaphor" to assist her in appreciating and

understanding her situation. This metaphor states that our personalities have various aspects and traits that I have divided into various parts. For example, that personality trait which allows us to think of and invent new ideas or novel ways to solve problems, I have termed the creative part. In Holly's case I identified three parts of her personality that I wanted her to access in solving her problem:

- 1) The smart part, or that part of her personality that makes good decisions.
- 2) The creative part, or that part of her that thinks up interesting ideas and solutions.
- 3) The fearful part, or that part of her that tells her when to be afraid of danger.

I wanted to communicate to her that I believed that all of her parts were trying to help the best way they knew to assist her in enjoying and dealing with life.

Session Two

Holly arrived with her father. It was apparent that she had been crying and she appeared to be frightened. Her father stated that she was a little apprehensive about today's session and added that her grandmother had died last week. In order to make it easier to come upstairs to the playroom the three of us made an agreement that if at any time she felt nervous or frightened she could come downstairs to where her father was waiting and be consoled by him. This appeared to be the assurance she needed and we both went upstairs to the playroom. Holly was reluctant to speak at first and would only nod her head yes and no. She began to speak when she realized that we knew some of the same people. She became silent whenever I would write anything down.

Holly had brought her art book with her and I decided to focus our attention on it to try to make the session more relaxed. She had done a portrait of herself swimming. The figure was well proportioned and the artwork was age appropriate and showed no signs of pathology. She said that she had been learning to swim at the Y.W.C.A. She also drew another picture of herself in school learning to write. Holly appeared to relax more as the session progressed. We continued with more casual conversation for the next fifteen minutes in which I learned that she had traveled to Jamaica with her family and that they were going to spend a day at Canada's Wonderland (an amusement park) during the summer. At one point in the conversation, I mentioned her father and she immediately became concerned and wanted to check and see if he was still waiting for her downstairs. I suggested that the easiest way to be sure would be to look out the playroom window to see if his car was still parked in the driveway. She did so and then settled back into the session. She told me about the different members of her family and about her two babies

(Cabbage Patch dolls) that she loved very much. I asked her if she liked stories and she answered 'yes' so I told her a story entitled *The Little Girl*,* which discussed different parts of the child's personality and her personal strengths and weaknesses.

Toward the end of the session I asked her how she felt about our hour together. She responded positively but with a pained expression on her face. I suggested that perhaps there were parts of the session she enjoyed and parts that she did not and to this she agreed. We concluded agreeing that we would meet again in one week's time and she would continue to draw in her art book and bring it back with her for the next session.

The Third Session

Goals for Session Three

- a I was unable to explore Holly's fears in earlier sessions and I wished to do so. I wanted to underscore with her the notion that fears are useful and can inform us of real danger. I wanted to identify the types of internal images and sounds that she experiences when she is frightened and to identify her physical reactions to fear.
- b I wanted to conduct initial relaxation exercises with her and teach her breathing techniques. I also wanted to suggest that there were tasks she had initially perceived as impossible for her to accomplish but which she was now is able to perform effortlessly. Examples of this would be learning to walk as an infant, to write or print her name, or learning to ride her bike, The message I wished to convey was that what once seemed impossible (Holly handling her emotional response to thunderstorms) would, in time, become easy for her to accomplish.
- c I selected three stories: the first was titled *The Norseman* (Burns, 1982), a story about a courageous Viking who learns to handle his fear by using visual imagery; the second, entitled *The Old Man and His Dreams*,* was a story I wrote for Holly to further underscore the use of imagery to cope with emotional stress; the final story, *Dream Tree* (Cosgrove, 1974), is about change and transformation.
- d Since Holly had responded so positively to drawing in her art book I wanted to give her an opportunity to draw for me sometime during the session.

Session Three

Holly arrived with her father and appeared a little teary-eyed but did come up to the playroom without any coaxing from her father or myself. She decided not to sit beside me while I told her the three stories and instead sat with the stuffed animals across the room. I did a simple breathing and relaxation exercise with her and then told her the three sto-

ries. She was very calm and relaxed after the storytelling and came across the room to show me the drawings in her art book. One of her drawings she said depicted her fear of the dark and said that when she was afraid she always felt better knowing that her big sister and her Cabbage Patch dolls were there to comfort her. Following our discussion I invited Holly down to the basement where the art room was. She was completely relaxed by this time and she chose to work with watercolour paints on Manila paper. She was not sure what she wanted to draw and I suggested that she draw a picture of herself outside on a sunny day. While she was drawing I discussed with her the emotion of fear. Sometime into our discussion I asked Holly if she knew anything her dad was afraid of and she said she believed that he was not afraid of anything. I said that I would bet he was afraid of something. We wagered two pennies and Holly went upstairs to speak with her father. She returned shortly after with two pennies and gave them to me saying: "My father is only afraid of one thing, sharks!" I commented that I felt that being afraid of sharks was very wise. This led our discussion to things that it was important to be afraid of as well as sharks: Holly listed fire, traffic and stray dogs. We ended the session in the living room upstairs discussing fears with her father. Holly decided to go downstairs to collect her drawings and I had a chance to talk with her father. I asked him to get a copy of Grimm's fairy tales (original translations) and tell them to Holly and any of the other children who wished to listen over the five-week break in Holly's treatment and to keep a diary of Holly's reactions to the weather.

THE TREATMENT PHASE

Preamble

The process to this point was focused on developing a trusting relationship with Holly, gathering information and material and developing insights with her which we could use in the second phase of Holly's treatment. I also used this time to introduce relaxation, storytelling, and art so that Holly would be able to adjust more easily to their demands in phase two. Finally, a mind set was established around the emotion of fear and the process of change that would allow Holly to see her fears and her reaction to them as a normal and healthy process that could be altered to suit her needs.

Stage two concentrates on suggesting alternative cognitive and behavioural reactions to inclement weather. It also attempts to normalize the healing process for children and youth by giving examples of others who have been successful in dealing with upsetting emotions. Stage two is intended to present, at a multi-sensory level, the information and strategies necessary for Holly to recover from her phobia. The primary treatment modality was therapeutic stories; however I also used art, drama, and discussion as secondary modes of intervention. By mak-

ing use of the basement and the upstairs playroom environments I illustrate the use of the two therapeutic milieus to further enhance the treatment experience.

The Fourth Session

Goals for Session Four

a It was apparent after spending time together that Holly was a visual learner and so I felt that the next three sessions should contain as much visual material as possible. I wanted to use art, visual imagery and dramatic techniques to enhance the effect of the therapeutic stories. I also planned to use concrete language along with numerous visual cues in this session to communicate behavioural strategies that she might find useful with her fear of storms.

b I intended to use two cognitive restructuring techniques called "linking" and "splitting" (Lankton & Lankton, 1983). These techniques are used to cause a change in the way children and youth think about, and respond to, certain stimuli by suggesting alternative ways of perceiving, understanding, and reacting. As a result, they can often weaken the child's reaction to the stimuli; in this case, to weaken Holly's fear response.

Splitting is a technique designed to split up, or interfere with, a behaviour or thought process, allowing the child to behave or react differently in response to thoughts about a negative event. For example, when Holly saw the weather changing she immediately became fearful. If, in the beginning stages of her fearfulness, a new strategy were introduced (go to parents and discuss fear), this act of interjecting a new behavioural reaction would weaken her fear response. To introduce the concept of splitting, I used stories that contained references to getting stuck and then taking situations apart and dividing them into smaller pieces.

Similarly, linking attaches a thought or behaviour to the maladaptive strategy to alter it or change its outcome. If Holly, who loved her Cabbage Patch dolls, was encouraged to pick up her dolls as soon as she felt her fear increasing she could be taught to link this positive action to her fear response thus weakening it. To introduce and reinforce the linking process, I used stories that made references to negative characters and objects becoming connected to more positive thoughts and experiences.

c The first story, *Jake O'Shawnesy* (Cosgrove, 1975), is the story of a seagull who has lost confidence in his ability to fly. I wanted to use this story to underscore that Holly's problem was in part due to a lack of confidence and that she, like Jake, could learn to overcome it. This story also represented the magnitude of the problem; not being able to fly if you are a bird is debilitating, as was her inability to function at home and at school. Another useful

aspect of this story was that Jake did relearn how to fly but he still had some difficulty landing, suggesting to Holly that she did not have to do this perfectly the first time and there was lots of room for failure and time for her to get it right. The second story I wrote specifically for this session was titled *The Cabbage Patch Kid*. The main character of this story, a Cabbage Patch doll, was always getting in the middle of things in order to cause change and had a habit of transforming negative situations into positive ones. I used the Cabbage Patch character because I knew that Holly had already linked this character with feelings of comfort and safety. The final story, *After the Wizard*, was an adaptation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Balm, 1900) which focused on segments in the story that exemplified the linking of positive outcomes to negative attitudes using the three supporting characters. I underscored the fact that the Scarecrow, who saw himself as being someone without a brain, was the most intelligent, the Tin Man showed great compassion while feeling that he lacked "the heart," and the Lion exhibited much courage in spite of his notion that he was cowardly.

- d I wanted to use artwork and drama to offer Holly the opportunity to explore her fears of storms in other mediums.

Session Four

Holly arrived with her father and this time appeared relaxed and pleased to see me. She walked upstairs ahead of me and sat down on the big pillows in the playroom where she had sat last time for the story-telling segment. I read her the three stories listed above. She sat quietly and attentively throughout the storytelling experience. As I began the final story, *After the Wizard*, she stopped me to say that she had seen the story on television two nights ago. I was pleased to hear this knowing the experience of the story would still be very vivid in her memory. After the final story I decided to capitalize on this coincidence and discuss Dorothy's experiences with storms and fears and the lessons they contained.

After ten minutes of casual conversation Holly and I went downstairs to the art room. This time I asked Holly to draw a picture of her outside when the weather was "not so good." She painted a picture of lightening and dark clouds with her in the middle with her umbrella. I drew a picture of a hailstorm (knowing that this was Holly's most dreaded storm) with frightened people running around outside. When we finished our pictures we discussed the content of both pictures and made the sounds of the storms and acted out the roles of the different characters in both pictures. We ran around the basement screaming, yelling and hiding under furniture. I was also aware that the basement was where Holly's nanny took her when it threatened to storm and felt that this experience would closely represent her experience and perhaps link it to a more positive and

less stressful experience. We finished our session upstairs sharing with Holly's father what all the noise he had heard from the basement was about. I asked Holly to bring her Cabbage Patch babies with her for her next session.

The Fifth Session

Goals for Session Five

- a Holly reacted positively and was most attentive last session during the telling of the story, *The Cabbage Patch Kid*, and thus my request for her to bring her dolls to the following session. I wanted to use the actual dolls as anchors for positive emotions and feelings associated with the process. I knew from the first session that she associated feelings of safety with these dolls and I wanted to intensify this feeling by including them in the therapy session. I also assumed that she would have these dolls with her during most of her traumatic experiences with the weather and believed that they could act as a source of concrete support. The story, *The Cabbage Patch Kid* had established the Cabbage Patch doll as a very resourceful and positive character and one that could link negative experiences to positive outcomes. I wanted to treat the dolls as if they were animate, that they could understand completely what I was saying, and were capable of causing the transformation I wanted for Holly.
- b I chose *Hucklebug* (Cosgrove, 1975) for the first story. This is the tale of a bug that feels he is a misfit and unwanted so he decides to run away from home. Once outside he becomes fearful and returns home. He overcomes his feelings of fear and alienation and becomes a useful member of his society. I wanted to communicate to Holly that I understood that she felt inadequate compared to her siblings and peers as a result of her phobia and that what she needed to do was use them to help her to get well, rather than running from them. Like *Hucklebug* she probably wishes the fear would go away but the story explains it cannot be wished away, requiring a return to face the feelings and to deal with them in cooperation with others. I wrote the second story, *The Gardener*, specifically for this session. The gardener is plagued by insects, from early spring (thunderstorm season) through to the fall. He discusses his problem with a wise old crone, Ruth, who has been gardening for some time and she teaches him to use companion planting to deal with his problem. She instructs him to plant herbs and flowers in amongst the vegetables (splitting) which will deter the insects and provide the environment with new smells and colour. The final story, *The Seamstress*, was also written for this session to further emphasize the process of splitting and linking. The main character was the mouse in Disney's "Cinderella," who is asked to make a gown that would be fit for a princess. She sews pieces of different materials (linking), which is

all that is available to her, to make the most elegant gown ever seen.

- c I also intended to continue with the work in the basement using art and drama to further strengthen the therapeutic interventions in this session. I wanted to explore the polarities of fear and bravery in the art/drama section.

Session Five

Holly arrived with her father and her two Cabbage Patch dolls. I gave the dolls a warm welcome and we went upstairs to the playroom. I read the three stories to Holly and her dolls, cueing them at certain times throughout the storytelling to emphasize the messages in the story. Holly appeared to be relaxed and spontaneous during the storytelling. During our time upstairs I continually underscored the resourcefulness of her dolls and their ability to comfort and relax Holly.

Having completed the storytelling we went downstairs to the art room. I asked Holly whether she wanted to draw a scared bunny or a ferocious lion. She chose the bunny and painted a very large and smiling rabbit. When our paintings were finished we acted out several scenarios of bravery and fear and the importance of each. I discussed with her the fact that all humans have scared bunnies and ferocious lions inside, as aspects of their personalities. The session ended with Holly and me trading drawings. She took my lion home with her and I kept her bunny. This is another example of communicating symbolically to underscore intention, which was, in this case, to encourage Holly to access her courage and bravery when it seemed appropriate and also to accept her fear. Symbolically Holly was taking home with her, in the guise of my drawing, a representation of courage, ferocity and all the qualities of a powerful lion.

The Sixth Session

Preamble

Two weeks after Session Five Holly's father called to say that Holly had slept through her first thunderstorm! He added that he and his wife were noticing a steady change in Holly's reaction to the weather. It appeared that the interventions were working and that she was beginning to internalize the necessary coping strategies to deal with her phobia. I decided that I would use this, our last session, to reinforce what had happened throughout the therapeutic process. I decided also to suggest to her parents and then to Holly that we negotiate for one more session in case she should regress and need further assistance.

Goals for Session Six

- a For this session I wanted Holly to focus on an image of her dealing effectively with all emotions associated to her phobic reaction and, should some regression occur, this would only further confirm that the therapeutic process was working. I also wanted to

reintroduce all the positive anchors I had developed for her throughout the therapeutic process so that they could be linked together and associated with one another in her thinking.

- b For the first metaphor I chose the story *Snaffles* (Cosgrove, 1980) to underscore the importance of emotional experiences (fear/courage) and living an emotional life. The second story, *Rambling Tale*, was a conglomerate of all the stories I had told Holly including the main characters and their messages. By bringing each character back into the playroom and in the context of the same story I was attempting to reinforce their importance and link their internal images in Holly's unconscious. The final story, also written for this session, was entitled *Magical Powers*. This story's characters personified each of the qualities, attributes, and perspectives that Holly needed to adopt in order to deal effectively with her phobic reaction. Its characters were named: Determination, Confidence, Bravery, and Comfort.
- c I wanted to complete the process in the art room/basement environment to further reinforce the lessons and thought processes that were attained there. I had used this room and its environment throughout the therapeutic process to consolidate and assimilate the lessons imparted in the storytelling component.
- d I wanted to test Holly's level of comfort in the therapeutic environment and I also wanted to see if she could use the therapeutic experience to self-nurture. As a result, I asked her parents to change the way in which Holly normally arrived at her sessions. They decided that Sue would drive her this time and she would drop her off and not come into the building with her.

Session Six

When Holly arrived she appeared a little timid and reticent to enter the building. She began to tear up as her mother waved good-bye to her but once up in the playroom she returned to her relaxed talkative self. I read her the three stories and she was attentive throughout. I discussed termination with her referring to our initial agreement of six sessions. I told her that I felt that we had had a productive series of appointments and I was going to keep one more session open for her whenever she or parents thought it would be useful. I asked her if she understood and if she could explain what she understood from what I had said. She was able to rephrase my words and their meaning accurately.

Next I moved our session downstairs for the final half-hour and I decided to give Holly the opportunity to draw whatever she liked. She decided to paint a picture of her beating her brother up and I painted a picture of a butterfly (a symbol of transformation) and I gave my drawing to Holly to take home. I informed her that regression was a normal and healthy part of any process and that should she want to see me again that she only had to request that her parents contact me.

While Holly was finishing her painting I went upstairs to meet with Holly's father, who had arrived to bring her home. I had discussed termination with him prior to this and reaffirmed the fact that if he saw any regression that concerned him he was to contact me immediately. Holly came upstairs with her butterfly painting and said good-bye.

FOLLOW-UP

Six Months: Our community had had some very intense thunderstorms over the summer including tornado warnings on at least three occasions; there was no word from Holly's family so I assumed that all was well. I telephoned her parents to do a six-month follow-up and Holly's father reported an overall positive season. He stated that her reactions to severe weather were sporadic which he felt coincided with the amount of media coverage she watched. He reported that even her most negative reaction was no longer a cause for concern. She had not missed any school or other outside activities because of the weather since our last appointment. She had slept through about half of the nighttime storms and for the others she needed some comforting but not as much as before. Holly's father believed that her reactions were well within the normal limits.

One-Year: Holly is still uncomfortable with storms but there has been no reoccurrence of her initial phobic response. She is functioning well in all areas of her life and parents feel confident that she has recovered fully.

Four-Years: Holly is eleven years old now and there has been no sign of any regression. Her father mentioned that a couple of times over the years she had asked why she went to see that man to listen to stories and draw pictures.

Fifteen-Years: Holly's family still lives in my community although I have not seen Holly since she was seven years old. I contacted her father in May of 1999 and he stated that Holly was still a little apprehensive about storms but this had not caused her any appreciable distress and there had been no reoccurrence of her phobic reactions to storms.

CONCLUSION

After five hours of direct therapeutic intervention along with an initial assessment interview with Holly and her parents, this seven-year-old child was able to overcome a severe phobic reaction to the weather. She was not asked to recall her phobic reaction or to discuss it in any direct way. This intervention allowed me to work intensely with this child and in an indirect fashion that avoided possible retraumatization, lessened the possibility of dependency on her therapist and empowered her to deal with a very difficult and complex problem.

This article explained the process of therapeutic storytelling, referred the reader to its connection to the literature in child and youth care, and presented a six-session program for working with children and youth with serious emotional problems. The CYW was directed to interview the

child or youth along with her caregivers to assess the problem, develop rapport, gather information, and prepare the child or youth for the therapeutic process. Stories were then to be selected for their appeal, message, and symbolic value and read to the child or youth. Various techniques such as art, drama, discussion, and cognitive restructuring were combined with core child and youth care skills to create a powerful healing environment and experience. Therapeutic storytelling is a natural fit for the seasoned CYW and can be an excellent challenge to the well-supervised novice.

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* An unpublished story written by me especially for Holly.