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Bibliolinking: An Adaptation of Bibliotherapy for University Students in Transition

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Bibliolinking: An Adaptation of Bibliotherapy for University Students in Transition

Kathryn M. Becker, Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson and Paula S. McMillen

Abstract

A team of student and faculty researchers worked in concert to develop a relevant training model for personnel who work with university students in transition. This model utilizes Bibliolinking which is an adaptation of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is a strategy which promotes therapeutic growth and change through use of various forms of written material. When applied for developmental purposes by non-counselors Bibliolinking™ can help residential students meet their needs for building relationships and normalizing transitional experiences of university life. Student Affairs personnel specializing in resident life education, i.e., resident assistants, play an important, often counselor-like role. Yet they receive no formal counseling training as part of their preparation. This project aimed to prepare resident assistants to apply relevant para-counseling skills with university residential students. A quasi experimental model and analysis were conducted. Results indicate training provides increased understanding of Bibliolinking and its appropriate application.

Project Overview

The Bibliolinking research project was a first step towards realizing a goal of assisting university students in transition through the facilitated use of written materials. Bibliolinking is a term and process adapted from Bibliotherapy by the student researcher. Bibliolinking is a process designed to use written materials as an aid to healing and therapeutic growth. The study collected data assessing resident assistants' (RA) familiarity with the necessary skill set for use of Bibliolinking as a helping strategy. The skill set for bibliotherapeutic work with university students was developed from reviewing the current literature, the Bibliotherapy Education Project tools, developmental knowledge of young adults, and talking with experts. RA training curriculum and standards were explored as well. Respondents were asked to self-report on their perceived level of ability to facilitate helping interactions, educate their clients and find appropriate books, as well as their comfort level in working with young adults in transition. Additionally, the researchers queried whether these skills were currently being used by RAs, and if Bibliolinking skills could be easily acquired through pedagogy. Further information was collected regarding confidence levels for locating appropriate materials and using these materials with university students in residence.

Project History

The origins of this research project developed from the confluence of several dynamics. The counselor education faculty member was currently living in a residence hall and serving in the role of faculty-in-residence (FIR) on campus. Coincidentally, the student researcher lived in the same residence hall. The FIR and the faculty librarian were

co-developers of the Bibliotherapy Education Project. Honors College students must complete a thesis project as part of their curriculum. Students must secure tenured faculty sponsorship and join them in their current research; finding a social science researcher proved challenging. It was during the weekly FIR open house, that the student researcher and counselor education faculty member discovered their joint passion for books and bibliotherapy, and so the research idea was generated. The project and adventure began in earnest.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to train RAs to use Bibliolinking. This approach was developed because of its anticipated utility with students experiencing transition and because of the easy availability of useful written materials such as books, informational brochures and internet sites. Bibliotherapy, from which Bibliolinking is derived, has often been used to normalize individuals' experiences, letting them know that they are not alone (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2005). This type of support is often times exactly what is needed by students in transition. RAs were selected as participants because of their involvement in residence life education and their ready access to university students. Prior experience as an RA provided the researcher with a firsthand look at the needs of that population, specifically a need for more relationship building skills, and methods for introducing new skills into existing relationships. Using this knowledge, an instructional module was developed that would teach these specific skills as well as how to implement them.

Methods and Procedures

The mean age of participants in this project was 19.5 years, making them members of the millennium generation. These participants were all students living in a learning community centered around a University Honors College theme, though not all of the participants were Honors College students. Twelve participants were given materials to participate in the study, and twelve of them completed the study. Ten of the twelve participants were Resident Assistants (RA's) in the residence hall that they lived in. Of the ten RA's 5 of them had been an RA for a year and a half, and 5 of them had been an RA for just 6 months. The participants' tenure at the University ranged from just 6 months to 2 and a half years. The project team considered this group's preference for digital over print materials. This led to the development of a compatible technological instructional module. The instructional module was textually dense, so energy was invested into also making sure it was visually appealing, which meant spreading the text out over many pages, and including a large number of graphics. Knowledge acquisition was assessed through identical pre- and post- Adapted Bibliotherapy Knowledge Acquisition Surveys (ABKAS). The survey asked questions about the participant's knowledge in the area of Bibliolinking, rating their knowledge with a Likert scale. The survey was piloted with Resident Assistants working in the same hall as the student researcher for face validity, and with experts for criterion validity. The word 'survey' was chosen deliberately and used instead of 'test' because university students gave verbal negative feedback to the word test.

Participants were asked to view the Bibliolinking instructional module and complete the (post) ABKAS within a two-week period. Specific participants who had not yet returned their materials were sent reminder e-mails and offered new copies of the

paperwork. Part of the instructional module was aimed at teaching participants to evaluate books for their general usefulness. Further, they were requested to add these evaluations to the Bibliotherapy Education Project online book database. Participants were requested to access <http://bibliotherapy.library.oregonstate.edu/search.php>, the bibliotherapy education project database, to locate material appropriate for specific situations.

Results

Participants learned quickly from their interaction with the instructional module. Indeed, they reported that they were already using many of the relevant skills, and could now identify the skill set by name. After administration of the surveys, recording and analysis of the data were completed. The researchers found that ratings increased, on average, 1.62 on a scale of 0 to 5 for each question supporting the initial hypothesis that the instructional module would be effective in increasing knowledge about Bibliolinking for participants. The questions with the largest increase were related, how others could benefit from Bibliolinking, and book evaluation skills. The following graph shows the mean scores for each question on both the pre- and post-survey:

Graphs/tables

Figure 1:

Benefits of Bibliotherapy

Bibliolinking can potentially be used by RAs who work with university students to help them deal with areas of concern and learn more effective transition coping skills. According to Zaccaria and Moses (1968) the key to good mental health is the ability to deal with the stress that comes from transition and situational crises. RAs need sufficient knowledge to be able to identify university students who are using poor coping methods, and to encourage them to begin using more effective strategies. Bibliolinking is a strategy that could be used to assist students to learn “more effective coping patterns,” through an “unobtrusive, non-threatening medium” (Tussing, 2001). Books can help readers gain new skills, as well as insights into things they may not yet have learned in their own lives (Gladding, 1994).

Project benefits

Participants of this study benefited in several ways. They gained a new set of skills, which would help them not only in their role as a leader in their residential community, but also in their personal relationships outside of their RA role.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

This study was conducted in only one residence hall, at one university. Additionally, the majority of the population were Honors College students, who perhaps had a high confidence level in their abilities prior to the study, which could have affected the way they self-reported their knowledge prior to using the learning module. This was a self-report tool, there was potential that results could be impacted by the participants' self-perception, emotional state, and memory related to affective valence and affective intensity. In other words, there is a tendency for individuals to remember that which is agreeable or positive and forget that which is disagreeable or negative (Stone, Turkkan, Bachrach, Jobe, Kurtzman, & Cain, 2000).

Future Research

There are endless possibilities for future research. Future research could collect data on people in any number of different helping roles in order to determine whether or not the learning module can be easily utilized. This study was conducted with students who were independent learners and are able to use a computer-based tool. Further research could be done to explore how the learning module could be adapted for students with disabilities or learning challenges. A 'next step' would be to administer this self-paced module in other university settings to establish generalizability with college populations.

Summary

Bibliotherapy has been shown to be developmentally appropriate and useful for individuals of varied ages experiencing transitional events such as divorce, death and moving (Berns, 2003; McEntire, 2003; Pardeck, 2005; Quackenbush, 1991; Sommer, 2003). Likewise children and adults have benefited from bibliotherapeutic approaches to

relieving generalized stress and anxiety (Reeves & Stace, 2005), learning better problem-solving skills (Forgan, 2002), and reducing feelings of isolation (Cohen, 1994). All of these areas are potentially relevant for students coping with college life on their own. Results of this study demonstrate that a self-paced learning module on Bibliolinking can be used to increase an individual's knowledge in the field of Bibliotherapy and better prepare them to use this as a helping strategy. The instructional module developed and used here could be adapted to different audiences serving various populations such as high school peer mentors or gerontological social workers. Books are everywhere, making them an inexpensive, accessible and time-effective tool for helping interventions.

A residential life helper, trained in the use of Bibliolinking, can make a major difference in university students' lives as they struggle and deal with change.

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Possible APPENDICES

Appendix A

Bibliotherapy Knowledge Acquisition Survey

____ Pre-Test ____ Post-Test

Name of Participant _____ Date _____

On a scale of 1-5, mark the number that most appropriately or accurately identifies your comfort and competence knowledge level related to the question. One indicates least knowledge level and five indicates the highest level of knowledge. 1 = little or no knowledge. 5 = high level of knowledge.

1.	I have no knowledge of this area
2.	I have little knowledge of this area
3.	I have an elementary level of knowledge of this area
4.	I have a fair amount of knowledge of this area
5.	I have an advanced level knowledge of this area

Questions

1. I am familiar with the term Bibliotherapy					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
Least Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5 Most Knowledge

2. I am familiar with the concept of “Book Linking”					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
Least Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5 Most Knowledge

3. I could list some of the possible benefits of using book linking in my helping relationships					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
Least Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5 Most Knowledge

4. I can review a book for its usefulness in “book linking”					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
Least Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5 Most Knowledge

5. I can evaluate if a book is appropriate for certain student related issues					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
Least Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5 Most Knowledge

6. I can evaluate literature as an “easy find” for college students				
---	--	--	--	--

Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
<i>Least Knowledge</i>	1	2	3	4	5 <i>Most Knowledge</i>

7. I can use the book review to find books that would be beneficial in certain situations					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
<i>Least Knowledge</i>	1	2	3	4	5 <i>Most Knowledge</i>

8. I can use the book review to find books to read for personal growth and enjoyment					
Circle the number that is most representative of your knowledge level					
<i>Least Knowledge</i>	1	2	3	4	5 <i>Most Knowledge</i>

9. I can identify various way to bring books or other reading materials into a conversation					
Circle the number that is most representative of your comfort level					
<i>Least Knowledge</i>	1	2	3	4	5 <i>Most Knowledge</i>

10. I know how to use books or other reading materials as a way to enhance my relationships					
Circle the number that is most representative of your comfort level					
<i>Least Knowledge</i>	1	2	3	4	5 <i>Most Knowledge</i>

11. I can confidently use a book or other reading materials as tool for helping others deal with life struggles or challenges					
Circle the number that is most representative of your comfort level					
Not at all Comfortable	1	2	3	4	5 Very Comfortable

Appendix B

IRB Application

Oct. 26, 2004

Application to Use Human Subjects in Research

Institutional Review Board

Oregon State University

Principle investigators: Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson, Ed. D. & Paula McMillen Ph.D.

1. Brief description.

The Biblio-Linking research study is the senior thesis of Kate Smith. Ms. Smith's interest in the Bibliotherapy Education Project led to the question, "How can Bibliotherapy be used in the residential life setting?" The existent web-based book evaluation tool and teaching module will serve as the groundwork for the Book Linking Study. Dr. Pehrsson and Kate Smith will work together to develop a modified module that will be utilized with non-professionals who serve in helping roles.

2. Participant Population.

The target number of participants will be 10-12 University students who have lived, or currently live, in a residence hall at Oregon State University. These participants will serve as the pilot group in the use of this specific Biblio-Linking Training Module. The participant population is not restricted to any gender or ethnic group. No participant data for those under 18 years of age will be considered. Participants must acknowledge having read and understood an Informed Consent Statement.

3. Methods and Procedures

Participants will be given a brief pre-survey (see attached) covering the use of Book-Linking in helping roles. After completion of the pre-survey participants will view a power point presentation, the Biblio-Linking Training Module. This module covers the use of the web-based book evaluation tool, and how to use book linking in helping roles. After viewing the Training Module, participants will be asked to complete a post-survey, which is the same as the pre-survey, to assess what skills were learned. Participants will have the opportunity to review books online using the web based book evaluation tool. Both the pre- and post- survey will ask for their self-rating of their comfort /knowledge level using Biblio-Linking in helping roles.

4. Risks

There are no direct risks to subjects who participate in this research.

5. Benefits

There are no direct benefits to subjects who participate in this research. Potentially, participants will gain knowledge of and specific skills in the use of Biblio-Linking in helping relationships.

6. Compensation

Participants will not be offered any compensation for participating in this study.

7. Informed Consent Process

Participants must read and acknowledge having read the Informed Consent before completing the initial survey.

8. Anonymity or Confidentiality

Responses of participants on the pre- and post-survey will analyzed and reported only in aggregate form. Names of participants associated with the pre- or post-survey will be kept confidential. Participants may choose whether their name is associated with the evaluations completed on the web site.

Biblio-Linking Project

Data: 10-27-04

Project title: Biblio-Linking for those in Helping Roles

Principle investigator: Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson

This study will examine the efficacy of a training module in the use of Biblio-Linking, and teaching module on the use of the Bibliotherapy Education Project Website. Results will be reported as aggregate data, so no individual will be identified or associated with particular pre- or post-survey results. Participation in this study presents no risk to participants.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent to let us use your data at any time or refuse to answer any question. If you choose to participate in this study, you will help us assess the effectiveness of the student Biblio-Linking training module and its utility. You will learn how to use Biblio-Linking in your role as a helper, and you will also be contributing to the database of evaluated literature which can be used by other students and those in helping roles.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson at 737.8551 or dale.pehrsson@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at 541.737.3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

PLEASE RETAIN THIS INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT for future reference.

If you are under the age of 18 you must so indicate here. _____

If you are over 18 years of age, indicate which one of the following statements is true:

____ I have read the above and consent to my pre - and post-survey results being used in your study.

____ I do not consent to participate in your study. (Your responses will not be included in any data analysis or reporting)

Signature

Date

Please print name

Appendix D

Prospective Participant Letter

Dear Prospective Participant:

We all use books, but using books have many benefits particularly in Residential life settings. Drs. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, and Paula McMillen have been leading an ongoing research project on Bibliotherapy, or the use of books and text in a therapeutic setting. This project entails many things, including use of an online tool for reviewing and selecting texts and educational purposes. As a student researcher I, Kate Smith, am looking to learn how Biblio-Linking, use of books, can be applied to a residence life experience. The information collected from those who chose to participate in this study will help us develop a better training module, and ideally implement it throughout residence life.

As the researchers, we are asking for your help to determine if this teaching tool is as effective as it can be. If you choose to participate you will first be given a pre-survey to assess your prior knowledge about Biblio-Linking. After taking the pre-survey, we will ask you to view a PowerPoint presentation intended to teach you more about book reviewing, Biblio-Linking, and its application to residence life. You can view this training module from your own computer at your leisure, or we can provide you with a computer to use. When you have completed viewing the training module we will ask you to take the post-survey, identical to the pre-survey, to assess what you have learned. Your total time invested can vary anywhere from less than an hour to three hours, depending on your learning aptitude and your interest in the material. The results will be published in my thesis work, as well as noted by the other researchers for possible later publication. Only a few university students involved in residence life will be asked to take part in this study, so your participation is very important.

The answers you provide will be kept confidential. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason and stop at any time.** If you do not want to participate and do not wish to be contacted further, please note that on your informed consent form. Your pre- and post-surveys will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and your name will not be identified, and will be coded with a number. There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this project; nor are there any direct benefits. There is however the possibility for you to gain some valuable information to use in your residence life setting.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact [Dr. Dale Pehrsson](#), at (541) 737-8551

or by email at dale.pehrsson@oregonstate.edu. Or Kate Smith at (541) 737-6604 or by e-mail at smithk7@onid.orst.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Thank you for your help. We appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson, Ed.D
Assistant Professor for Counselor Education
Oregon State University

Kate Smith Student,
University Honors College,
Oregon State University

Appendix E

Teaching Module

On Compact Disk

Kate Becker MS, is the Resident Director of at Oregon State University. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson is former Faculty in Residence at OSU and associate professor at University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Paula McMillen is associate professor and research librarian at OSU.