**Exploring children's writing during a therapeutic storytelling intervention: a mixed methods study**

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**Description/Abstract**

Emotional difficulties in children and young people are associated with poor behavioural, social and educational outcomes (Kern, Hilt-Panahon & Sokol, 2009). A systematic review was carried out to explore the effects of therapeutic writing interventions on students’ emotional and academic outcomes and to develop an understanding of the underlying mechanisms that might help to explain these effects. Therapeutic writing interventions were found to be effective in reducing symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety and were related to improvements in academic performance. Underlying mechanisms that were associated with positive outcomes included changes in cognition, improvements in coping strategies and improvements in working memory capacity. The review highlighted a lack of research exploring the effects of therapeutic writing techniques on academic outcomes with younger students.  The empirical paper sought to address some of the gaps in the existing research highlighted in the review. The research utilised a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to investigate the effects of a therapeutic storywriting intervention on children’s writing. The first quantitative phase consisted of two studies. The first study investigated the effects of a therapeutic storywriting intervention on children’s writing achievement in comparison to a matched control group. The intervention group (n=28) made significantly greater academic gains compared to the control group (n=28). The second study examined to what extent the intervention facilitated cognitive changes through exploring changes in children’s use of written language during the therapeutic storywriting intervention. There were some significant changes in children’s use of emotional and causal words; however these did not significantly predict greater academic gains. In the second qualitative phase, narrative analysis was used to explore and compare the stories written by children who had made the most and least gains. There were a number of similarities between both groups’ stories; however more of the stories written by children who had made the least gains ended negatively and lacked helpful secondary characters. The quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed with reference to prior research.