

**Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: A Counselor Educator's Experience**

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**Abstract**

Various therapeutic creative and/or expressive arts, such as poetry therapy, can be used by mental health practitioners in many sittings with a variety of clients. These modalities seem to be particularly adaptive and effective with children and adolescents. However, as a counselor educator, the author found teaching and participating in poetry therapy with graduate-level students to also be effective. Following the basic pedagogy suggested by Kenneth Koch (1970) in *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*, graduate students and the author were able to experience personal and professional insight in a graduate-level counseling course.

The focus of this article is on introducing poetry therapy to graduate-level counseling students. Ideas and examples from Kenneth Koch's (1970) *Wishes, Lies, and Dream: Teaching Children to Write Poetry* were used throughout the graduate course titled Counseling Children and Adolescents. Ideas from Kathi Appelt's (2002) *Poems From Homeroom: A Writer's Place to Start*, were also explored during class instruction.

Because the class included graduate-level students enrolled in the community and the school counseling tracks, the author emphasized the use of poetry therapy to meet academic goals, such as reading and writing skills, as suggested by Malekoff (2002), as well as therapeutic goals. In class discussions, particular attention was given to research involving self-esteem and reading (Commare & Sedlack, 2003; Dean & Trent, 2002; & Richardson, 2003) and what effect the inclusion of poetry in the researcher's interventions may have had on the results.

The goals of Poetry Therapy as stated by the National Association for Poetry Therapy include the following:

1. To develop accuracy and understanding in perceiving self and others.
2. To develop creativity, self-expression and self-esteem.
3. To strengthen interpersonal and communication skills.
4. To ventilate overpowering emotions and release tension.
5. To find new meaning through new ideas, insights, and information.

[www.poetrytherapy.org](http://www.poetrytherapy.org)

These goals can be viewed as appropriate goals or objectives when working with children or adolescents who struggle with emotional or learning disabilities as well as with adults who are challenged with low self-esteem and illiteracy.

In preparing for the course, the author luckily discovered Koch's (1970) *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*. Several of the ideas and techniques that Koch shared concerning working with children, the author found to also be effective in teaching adult, graduate-level students about poetry therapy. As with the children whom Koch taught, these adult learners also flourish in a non-judgmental environment.

As the author introduced Koch's (1970) poetry ideas such as "I Wish" and "I Used to/But Now" an atmosphere free of competition and free of academic perfection was established. The graduate-level students were encouraged to not be concerned with rhyme, meter, punctuation, or spelling so that emotions and the expression of feelings could flow. The graduate-level students were invited to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas without the threat of any professional analysis of information shared.

Following the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice ([www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)) Section F.1.a, the author served as a role model for the class by sharing her own thoughts and feelings through poems she had written. The ideas and inspiration for the poems came from reading the ideas and suggestions of Koch (1970) and Appelt (2002).

*Changes in Life: I Used To/But Now*

I use to sleep late, but now I get up early  
 I use to have a schedule, but now I am loose  
 I use to want to stay here, but now I want to leave  
 I use to be a sister, but now I am alone  
 I use to be kin to another family, but now I am alone  
 I use to live close, but now I am a bit far away

*Lies*

I love liver to eat  
 I love asparagus too  
 I love to get up early and see the sun

*More Lies*

I am in space on a space ship with Brad Pitt  
 I am in the bathtub with dirt for soap  
 T trees are blue and they bush the grown with thorns  
 I became a millionaire playing lotto  
 My kitty became a lion and ate my house

*Colors*

The color of Friday the 13 is gray  
 The color of the day is gray  
 The cool weather is grayish black  
 The mailman coming is yellow  
 Warm is yellow  
 Bills to pay are red

*Who Would Have Thought!*

Who would have thought  
 I was better than my brother at basketball  
 Who would have thought  
 my brother made B's in conduct in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade too

As these graduate-level counseling students progress in their professional and personal development toward becoming a counselor, the expressive and/or creative arts can be effective and rewarding within

the therapeutic relationship. Collaboration with each other and with the author toward a group professional presentation of poetry therapy was and will continue to be encouraged as a part of this progress and development.

**References**

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