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Applying Expressive Arts Therapy Interventions with Chinese Adolescents with

Academic Maladjustment

May 2021

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Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Expressive Arts Therapy, MA

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Abstract

This thesis first explores the relationship between several concepts related to academic stress (academic burnout, academic weariness or school weariness, and school refusal) and their influencing factors, which are collectively referred to as academic maladjustment. It then reviews the empirical intervention research on academic maladjustment among Chinese adolescents. Study review has found that effective talk therapy interventions for Chinese adolescents with academic maladjustment often adopt a systematic perspective of family therapy and related techniques. Researchers worked with adolescents on their personal factors that contribute to academic maladjustment and work on the interpersonal level and obtained the cooperation of parents and teachers who were closely related to adolescents' academic adjustment, which was seldom discussed by creative arts therapy.

In the end, this thesis puts forward the conceptions on utilizing the methods of focus-oriented expressive arts therapy from the perspective of brief family therapy in a problem-solving approach to intervening Chinese adolescents with academic maladjustment and suggests future study to use Expressive Therapies Continuum to help academic maladjustment adolescents' family.

Key words: academic maladjustment, Chinese adolescent, focus-oriented expressive arts therapy, brief family therapy, Expressive Therapies Continuum

Applying Expressive Arts Therapy Interventions with Chinese Adolescents with Academic

Maladjustment

Introduction

Academic stress, particularly for adolescents experiencing puberty, can increase anxiety

and academic burnout (Xiao, Liang & He, 2014), which may be connected to negative

emotions and avoidance behaviors such as school refusal or drop out. Research on academic

stress could help the public prevent students from developing negative emotions or severe

avoidance behaviors to learning.

Liu (2016) stated that academic stress is a chronic stressor that permeates all aspects of

academic activities of middle school students. Moreover, the lower students' academic

performance, the more significant academic stress they suffered (Liu, 2016), which affected

students' learning engagement and further reduced their academic achievement.

According to many Chinese studies, academic stress is the primary stress of Chinese

middle school students (Zhang, 2014; Yuan, 2014). Research indicated that Chinese middle

school students' academic stress was highly positively correlated with anxiety, depression,

and suicidal intention (Yao, 2016). Academic stress, weariness, burnout, and school refusal

are topics discussed frequently by the author of this capstone thesis with students and what

teachers and parents are most concerned about. In this thesis, academic stress, burnout,

weariness, and school refusal are collectively referred to as academic maladjustment. There

are internal relationships among these four.

Academic Stress

According to Pan et al. (2016), academic stress is equivalent to psychological distress.

Li et al. (2019) expanded on previous research and maintained that psychological pressure

and tension experienced by school-age children is rooted in the high-pressure demands of the

school system. These definitions only attribute academic stress from an objective point of

view, which is the academic task. They cannot explain why students experience feelings of confusion, distress, or tension when faced with academic tasks.

One definition of academic stress frequently cited by some other scholars (Liu, 2016; Zhang, 2014; Cao & Liu, 2017) emerged in the research conducted by Chen (2004), who described academic stress as "students' reaction or subjective feeling to the demands of internal and external academic environment that exceed their ability to cope with or may threaten them." This definition describes that academic stressors include objective academic tasks or other objective factors and subjective factors -- that is, learners' requirements for learning, which are beyond their ability to cope with or threaten them based on their subjective assessment. In other words, this kind of academic stress is beyond the common difficulties that every learner may encounter in the learning process. This capstone thesis adopted Chen's definition of academic stress.

Academic Burnout

Wang (2013) integrated the viewpoints of various scholars and believed that academic burnout mainly refers to emotional and psychological exhaustion, the sense of low efficiency, and the alienation between teachers and students reflected in the learning process. Academic burnout is reflected in the alienation of teacher-student relationships and parent-child relationships as well.

Academic or School Weariness

Based on various definitions of academic or school weariness, Mai (2019) believed that this is a kind of emotional or behavioral rejection towards learning activities shown by learners.

School Refusal

Liu (2020) summarized the different definitions of school refusal in China and the West and believed that school refusal refers to intermittently not being able to go to school or stick

to class for a day, often with a series of physical and mental symptoms.

Internal Relationships Among These Four Factors

Liao (2013) found that different factors of academic pressure have different predictive effects on learning burnout. The higher the academic task requirements, the more obvious learning burnout. However, the higher students' perceived external expectations, the lower learning burnout was likely to be. Liao (2013) thought students might interpret this external expectation as a form of emotional support. However, this expectation should not be a kind of pressure expectation; parents or teachers expect students to complete academic tasks that they have to do without excuse or impossible to achieve. Such expectation will reduce student's learning motivation (Yang, 2019), decrease self-efficacy, increase emotional exhaustion, and thus increase academic burnout (Zhu & Wang, 2009).

Ma & Li (2009) found through questionnaire analysis and interview of college students that academic weariness emotion did not necessarily lead to academic weariness behavior. The two are not one-to-one corresponding. However, academic burnout has high predictability to academic weariness emotion and academic weariness behavior, respectively. School refusal itself is a behavior of academic weariness, which is also the most troublesome phenomenon to parents and teachers.

Influential Factors of Academic Maladjustment

Many personal factors are contributing to academic maladjustment. Ma and Li (2009) found that core self-evaluation (self-esteem, self-efficacy, neuroticism, and sense of internal control) and academic burnout had high negative predictivity for academic weariness in a study of college students. Specifically, the emotion of academic weariness not only came from low core self-evaluation but also might come from academic burnout. Nevertheless, for the behavior of academic weariness, the primary source is the low core self-evaluation.

Their findings echo with other researchers. Zhu and Wang (2009) found that academic

stress would directly lead to learning burnout and deplete students' sense of self-efficacy, leading to learning burnout. The deep analysis showed that the emotional exhaustion might be caused by academic stress, which made students question their essential ability and feel that they gradually lose their sense of control in the learning process. Wei (2017) also found that the level of self-control could negatively predict academic weariness. Besides, students with low self-esteem tend to be more damaging in dealing with academic setbacks. Thus, they are more likely to feel high academic stress (Zhang, 2014).

Ma and Li (2009) found through data analysis that the level of neuroticism in the core self-evaluation had a positive prediction effect on academic burnout and weariness. When students are faced with academic pressure, individuals with low neuroticism may be more likely to adopt an upbeat coping style, thus reducing tension. Wang (2015) also found a significant negative correlation between emotional resilience and academic burnout. Tian (2016) also found significant differences in anxiety, depression, compulsion, paranoia, and other mental symptoms between the academic weariness and control groups. Tian (2016) found that students with academic weariness also tend to have some personality characteristics of pursuing perfection, manifested in setting extremely high goals and standards for themselves, excessive planning and control, excessive caution and carefulness, fear of failure, and other aspects. When they encounter setbacks, they tend to escape and blame themselves easily and seldom adopt positive coping methods such as solving problems or seeking help.

Wen et al. (2014) found that individuals who pursue success usually take precautions, accumulate resources, and develop skills to prevent pressure from long-term stressors, and adopt more planning and target management strategies to deal with pressure from short-term frontal stressors, and hold an optimistic attitude towards pressure. Thus, they can reduce academic burnout and engage more. Students who avoid failure usually only take last-minute

measures to deal with the pressure sources, but this has no noticeable effect on reducing academic burnout.

The academic stress perceived by middle school students is influenced by personality, and extroverted students have a lower perceived academic stress (Luo, Liu & Chen, 2019). Liu (2016) found that high academic resilience could effectively help middle school students adjust or weaken the negative consequences caused by academic stress.

Besides personal factors stated before, social support plays a vital role in alleviating students' academic maladjustment: compared with non-academic-weariness adolescents, those with academic weariness tend to experience worse interpersonal relationships, more punishment, and lower social support (Tian, 2016). Wei (2017) also found that social support played a partial mediating role between self-control and academic weariness, so alleviating academic weariness could start from improving their social support system.

Good teacher-student relationships and classmate relationships are significantly negatively correlated with academic burnout (Xu, 2014). The degree of academic burnout brought by interpersonal relationships is also affected by students' core self-evaluation. The negative self-evaluation will aggravate the academic burnout experienced by students in bad interpersonal relationships (Xu, 2014).

Liu (2017) found that when students could feel that teachers would respect students' decisions, understand students' feelings, provide necessary supports, and help students complete academic challenges independently, instead of being demanding, the level of academic burnout would be reduced. Such a feeling of being respected would also enhance students' learning ambition and reduce their academic burnout. Also, peer support can reduce the risk of depression caused by academic stress (Li & Zhang, 2014).

Moreover, poor family relationships and atmosphere also contribute to academic maladjustment. Liao (2013) found that the students with low academic burnout had

significantly higher levels of family members' closeness, emotional communication and expression, and attention to and understanding of others than those with high academic burnout. Luo et al. (2016) found that parents' parenting style can predict students' academic burnout, and negative self-concept can amplify the negative influence of parents' parenting style, thus increasing academic burnout.

Specifically, the negative parenting style of parents, expressing anger and aggression publicly among family members, and the contradiction and opposition among family members are all related to the high academic stress perceived by middle school students (Luo, Liu & Chen, 2019). From the perspective of parenting style, parents' timely understanding of their children's academic stress and providing necessary emotional support can help reduce children's anxiety and protect children's mental health (Xiao, Liang & He, 2014).

One study indicated that when parents force their children to study harder or have high expectations of their children's academic performance, children are likely to show more negative behaviors such as distraction and withdrawing from learning, decrease the motivation of self-determination, and increase negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom, and depression (Zhang et al., 2021). Additionally, when parents ignore their children's understanding of knowledge or improve their abilities and overemphasize comparison with others to avoid falling behind, children's negative emotions and behaviors towards learning may be more prominent. Compared with teenagers with high academic achievement, they found that parents' more attention to the academic performance of teenagers with low academic achievement will help students improve their understanding of knowledge and increase their level of academic engagement.

Influenced by traditional culture, Chinese parents tend to attach great importance to their children's studies. Liu (2016) found that middle school students whose parents with lower

educational degree feel more academic stress. However, Tong (2016) found that the higher the educational background of parents, the heavier the students' perceived academic burden. There was no significant difference in students' academic stress from different family backgrounds. According to Tong (2016), parents from upper-class families have more time and ability to help their children with their study; on the other hand, children from upper-class families tend to regard study as a way to promote their development, while children from lower-class families tend to think that academy is related to finding a good job or adding glory to their family.

From the perspective of family structure, Wang et al. (2012) found that children from reorganized families felt tremendous academic stress. From the perspective of family function, Liu (2020) believed that conflicts between parents would make children feel worried about their parents and split children's loyalty to their parents. Academic stress or weariness will divert the conflict between the couple, thus avoiding the breakdown of the relationship. Parents' marital conflict can significantly predict students' academic burnout, in which a lousy parenting style plays an important role (Ma et al., 2017).

Besides family factors, many school factors contribute to adolescents' academic maladjustment. Research indicates that students with a high sense of school well-being tend to effectively take measures to deal with low academic stress (Cao & Liu, 2017). Also, studies have shown that, compared to the sound teacher-student relationship, peer friendship, or family support, teachers' permission to students to schedule their learning and help students experience the high academic self-efficacy would most effectively ease the impact on the students' academic pressure (Li et al., 2017). A positive, warm class environment tends to raise the student's self-esteem and let the students have more confidence to face the challenge of learning and requirements, which produces less academic stress (Li et al., 2019). In addition, good class order, discipline, and competition are significantly negatively

correlated with academic burnout. The influence of class environment on students' academic burnout is also affected by students' core self-evaluation (Xu, 2014). The academic weariness in ordinary classes is more severe than that in excellent classes, and it becomes worse with the rise of grades (Mai, 2019). Through investigation, interviews, and literature analysis, it is found that teachers' teaching methods, exam-oriented, and utilitarian education mentality, excessive homework, and lack of necessary communication with students also make students increasingly hate learning (Wu, 2018).

Liu (2020) noted that schools take the attitude of "judging heroes by scores" under the pressure of entrance examination. Excessive emphasis on scores or rankings will lead teachers to pay too much attention to scores and pass on pressure to students, thus forming vicious competition among students and increasing academic pressure on each other. Also, making up for the defects makes students challenging to recognize their value and strengths. So, students are easily confused about their motivation to study. This sense of confusion is a result of academic stress and an additional source of academic stress.

In summary, personal factors, interpersonal factors, and family or school background contribute to adolescents' academic maladjustment, which makes school counselors' work complex than private practice. The following literature review will analyze the effectiveness of intervention studies on Chinese adolescents' academic maladjustment and see which factors are most influential.

Literature Review

Quan and Pei (2010) summed up the following experience based on a grade 12 student with academic weariness in a counseling report. They believed that avoiding diagnosis (labeling) and improving self-confidence were the key points of counseling. Avoiding diagnosis, within this context, is ethical for the counselor in the Chinese setting as the focus in boosting the client's confidence. Because, in essence, self-confidence is the relationship

between expectations (including internal and external expectations) and individual self-efficacy. It is a focus that must be paid attention to in dealing with academic weariness. The researcher also adopted family therapy. However, in my opinion, what the researcher adopted here was more like individualized therapy for the client with the accompany of the client's parents. The parents' presence provided the necessary information, but the researchers did not address whether the client's low self-esteem was related to parental expectations.

Guo (2014) proposed several factors that contribute to Z's academic weariness in a social work study to this junior high school student. After investigation, factors such as the lousy communication style and family atmosphere in the family, the client Z's negative understanding of school education and negative self-concept, and Z's long-term accumulated low self-efficacy made Z's study even worse. Although the researcher emphasized the importance of changing the surrounding environment to help Z, the intervention process of the researcher did not involve changing Z's family or school environment. However, it only involved helping Z change the client's attribution mode of failure, empowering Z with the help of the humanism concept, improving Z's confidence, and changing the specific behavior of academic weariness through behavioral therapy. Although some results have been achieved, researchers believed that to change Z fundamentally, the environment around Z needed to be changed. Due to the limited capacity of the researcher, part of the family work was later referred to family therapists.

In a study using a narrative family therapy, the researcher (Shang, 2017) helped H, her parents, and teachers to face H's academic weariness. The researchers found that externalizing the problem did not make the problem disappear, while the mainstream narrative discourse was very powerful. Besides, the researcher's understanding of the

mainstream narrative (academic weariness was an objective existence, and students should face it) also brought challenges to the researchers in the application of narrative family therapy. In essence, the researcher only took the family as the research object and used the narrative therapy technique but failed to look at the problem from the systematic and functional view of family therapy. Therefore, researchers see that externalizing problems will not make them disappear, precisely related to the family and class environment where H existed. Researchers should encourage parents and teachers to reflect on their mainstream narrative of H and help them see H's tributary story so that parents and teachers can see the hope of change. Also, because H's verbal expression ability is limited, and the externalization, deconstruction, and rewriting of narrative therapy require a certain level of verbal expression ability, there are difficulties in the intervention process.

In a group counseling for students with academic weariness, Wang (2015) focused on helping them manage their emotions, correct unreasonable cognition, develop positive emotions, experience confidence, and perceive their learning motivation and influence on learning. Compared with the control group, the academic weariness of the experimental group decreased significantly, but it still existed. So, it is necessary to do the individual work of students. However, if students' external environment of weariness cannot be changed, academic weariness cannot be fundamentally changed. So, the school needs to mobilize parents and teachers to promote change. Besides, differentiated individual counseling, working with families of students with academic weariness, and doing the follow-up study are what the researchers hope to carry out in future studies to make up for the deficiencies of this study.

In a group counseling program to improve learning motivation, Luo (2005) designed a group counseling program that integrated natural therapy, humanistic therapy, and rational, emotional therapy based on the four factors involved in the Diagnostic Test of Learning Motivation by Zhou (1991). Each factor involved a separate group counseling module. After each module was completed, statistics were conducted to compare the data of the experimental group and the control group and analyze the effectiveness of this part of group counseling. This kind of rigorous research is worth learning. Through data analysis, in this study, the best effect of group counseling was to use realistic therapy to stimulate students' achievement motivation and learning responsibility. In addition to this, the researchers also incorporated expressive arts methods such as psychodrama, projection drawing in this program. They mobilized their parents and teachers to write down their observations on the advantages of group members, contributing to improving the social support system of low academic motivation participants. However, the data showed that this study had no significant results in improving students' learning self-efficacy, reducing achievement motivation, and avoiding failure, and reducing test anxiety. The reasons may be related to the fact that the group counseling activities designed by the researchers do not directly involve these aspects, or it may be related to the fact that the school education environment and family education environment had not been improved. The study found that only helping students identify unreasonable beliefs and relaxation training cannot help students reduce test anxiety. Besides the previous deficiencies, the researchers also hoped to make breakthroughs in the richness and creativity of activities in future research, which expressive arts can go a long way.

Five studies with limited effectiveness on helping Chinese adolescents with academic maladjustment focused only on adolescents' personal factors and no treatment regarding interpersonal factors or background affect. The following studies are research with enough effectiveness.

In one study, Zhu et al. (2019) compared family therapy combined with cognitive therapy and cognitive therapy itself on the effectiveness of helping adolescents with school refusal. Therapists who applied family therapy with cognitive therapy focused on the treatment of the entire family system. They adhered to the systematic view and did not directly pursue cognitive comprehension comparing with cognitive therapy. Instead, they used questions to indirectly inspire family members to think, identify behaviors and cognitive and emotional patterns that affect their communication, and trigger changes in the interaction patterns, to help adolescents improve school refusal and other psychological and behavioral problems. Specific methods include but are not limited to evaluating family systems, using family therapy questioning techniques (cyclic questioning, hypothetical questioning, differential questioning), positive interpretation of resource orientation, and homework assignment. Compared with applying cognitive therapy solely to help Chinese teenagers with school refusal, adopting family therapy with cognitive therapy was more effective for improving the family system dynamics and psychological behavior problems of teenagers with school refusal. The back-to-school rate of school refusal teenagers is significantly higher than the cognitive therapy group (Zhu et al., 2019).

A case study of using structured family therapy to help an adolescent with academic weariness, An (2006) described the hypothesis of structured family therapy for school

weariness and the related intervention steps in detail. The researchers believed that the

problem of weariness is related to parents' failure to take up the responsibility of educating

their children (that is, they do not play a role) and their responsiveness to their children (that

is, the internal boundaries of the family are not clear), so the goal of intervention is to

improve the family structure. The researchers carried out several stages successively:

establishing the professional relationship, evaluating, intervening, strengthening, and

reevaluating. The intervention of weariness adolescents mainly includes clarifying the

reasons for weariness, changing the attitude towards learning, and the motivation of

strengthening learning; Parent intervention mainly includes prompting parents to realize that

their children's current situation was related to their parenting style, arousing parents' sense of

crisis, and encouraging parents to set an example in learning, to become children's role

models and to change the way of communication with children.

In a case where narrative family therapy is applied to deal with the academic weariness

of a left-behind children H who living with H's parents in cities, the social worker researcher

(Shang, 2017) helps left-behind children H through the externalization, deconstruction, and

rewriting techniques of narrative therapy, so that parents and school teachers were able to see

the "tributary" narrative of H's learning ability and attitude in addition to the "mainstream

narrative" of study fatigue, and helped H develop learning motivation and confidence. This

application runs through the core point of resource orientation in the postmodern

psychotherapy approach. It constructs a family and school atmosphere that affirms and helps

students write narrative letters, which is very worthy of reference.

Zhou (2019) observed that the learned helplessness in learning and the poor family

function were the important reasons for this middle school student's academic weariness. Therefore, the researchers mobilized teachers to help A develop his painting potential and gave positive encouragement. Moreover, the researchers also invited family members to use role-playing to promote the awareness of poor communication among family members and replace negative judgments with positive encouragement, which ultimately helped A return to school. From the perspective of a systemic view, researchers help A and A's family activate the functions of various systems, which plays an important role in helping school-weary teenagers to return to school.

In a group counseling study using Solution-Focused techniques to help high school students reduce academic burnout, the researcher (Wu, 2018) helped high school students discover their learning advantages, make full use of the existing experience in identifying and processing emotions, effectively increasing sleep time and other aspects, and used sculpture techniques to explore the social support system and imagine the changes that their growth might bring to the social support system, and constantly encouraged and recognized the changes of group members. This is different from the previous case study of changing the environment to promote personal change. In this Solution-Focused group, the researcher focused on the exceptions when individuals were rarely affected by external negative effects and the impact of individual change on interpersonal relationships. The possible changes of participants in the future and the changes brought by them in interpersonal relationship interaction, and the encouragement given by present participants to each other were regarded as the driving force to motivate group members to move forward. This is very much in line with the psychological needs of Chinese middle school students, and it is easier than trying to

change families and teachers. Convincing individuals that their changes can affect their

relationships can be very much possible in a group setting.

In a social work study of using rational emotional therapy to help Z, a middle school

student with academic weariness, Huang (2018) not only corrected Z's cognition with

traditional methods such as "debate" and homework but also integrated expressive arts

approaches such as "role-playing" and "movie-watching" to help Z consolidate his cognition,

find examples, and stimulate his academic motivation. The researcher also communicated

with Z's parents, making Z's parents realize that Z's academic weariness would be difficult to

change if his parents' understanding of learning and communication style remained

unchanged. The researcher also assigned homework to promote parent-child positive

communication, encouraged parents to accompany Z more, and gave necessary

encouragement to Z's progress. Finally, Z's academic weariness of study was changed. It was

the role of rational emotional therapy and the use of expression art, behavior therapy, and

family therapy that worked out, which was a successful case to help weariness.

Some researchers (Tao & Ning, 2011) adopted a combination of individual counseling,

group therapy, and family therapy when dealing with cases of weariness, helping teenagers to

let down their guard, know themselves and see the harm of Internet addiction in groups. In

individual counseling, they combined the existential humanistic orientation with cognitive

therapy, helping clients accept the negative emotions, promote clients to perceive the one-

sided cognition of study, and solve the individual issues that have not been touched in the

group. In family therapy, the researchers helped clients to consolidate group and individual

counseling effects. Researchers also helped family members be aware of the connection

between the missing parent's role, improper communication with academic weariness, and Internet addiction and helped family members set clear boundaries. This kind of combination of different therapy is reasonable, and each treatment form target is clear and proper, which is very suitable for the application of Chinese school counselors.

Nevertheless, often counselors use cognitive therapy to help students understand that their one-sided view of learning can cause their resistance. The researchers saw the effects of family dysfunction and students' failure to achieve self-identity on academic weariness and Internet addiction. However, they did not mention that academic weariness and Internet addiction can also contribute to student's failure to achieve self-identity and family dysfunction, which is the circular causality in family therapy.

Besides verbal therapy interventions, many researchers also adopted creative arts in dealing with students with academic maladjustment.

Music and music group tutoring are widely used in helping students with academic maladjustment, which may be related to the fact that music therapy was launched earlier in mainland China and has higher popularity than other creative arts therapies. In an experiment using Directed Imaginary and Music (DIM) to reduce the academic stress of third-grade graduate students, Nie (2013) used EEG and questionnaire to collect data before and after each time participants experienced DIM. Given the analysis, the researcher found that DIM could significantly reduce anxiety compared to the initial state. Furthermore, the anxiety reported after the second time DIM experience was also lower than the first time significantly. Therefore, this is an excellent technique to help students to reduce academic stress.

Zhi (2019) incorporated group music therapy with college students in science and technology and found that it could help college students relieve depressed emotions, improve their psychological state, become more optimistic in interpersonal communication, and improve their mental resilience. This music group therapy program included music improvisation, music games, recreative and receptive music activities. The advantages of this study were constantly adjusting the implementation plan according to the participants' reactions. They constantly encouraged members to express themselves, which led to increased communication between therapist and client, prompting participants to express repressed emotions and become more optimistic in their interpersonal interactions. These techniques can be used in music therapy groups and expressive art therapy groups.

In a group music program to help middle school students relieve test anxiety, He (2019) proposed an eight-week music therapy to a whole class. The group music program included DIM, progressive relaxation, and other receptive music activities. Besides, stress reduction exercises with music and discussion were also included. Compared with the control group, the test anxiety of the experimental group was significantly reduced. Although the researcher said that classroom discipline was difficult to ensure, students still actively participated and received recognition from students. This program is practical for middle school teachers. The researchers set different instructions according to different musical themes to implant different positive beliefs to help middle school students change unreasonable cognition, improve self-awareness and autonomy, and gain positive emotional experience. A similar 8-session intervention study using DIM and stress reduction exercises (Li, 2014) showed that music therapy was helpful to relieve anxiety and improve test scores.

Yang (2015) compiled the Handbook of Music Psychological Counseling and conducted experiments to investigate whether group therapy combining music relaxation techniques, musical expression, and musical imagination can effectively alleviate test anxiety of Grade Nine students. In group therapy, there are music elements and rational emotional therapy, and time management to help students build a reasonable cognitive system, adjust the attitude towards the exam, and decrease the level of anxiety. Compared with the control group, the experimental group's test anxiety and anxiety level had been significantly improved, and the academic performance kept rising. Researchers say follow-up studies can consider using this manual in different grade students, enriching the manual's content, and exploring the manual to the applicability of different group leaders. The study did not consider family or school factors that may contribute to their academic stress. Follow-up studies with participants to determine whether the effects would have a long-term impact are recommended in the future.

Jiang (2014) combined music therapy with sand tray therapy, creating group music and sand tray therapy. Participants were guided to experience the music and embody their feelings through the sand tray, integrating the music and sand tray organically in the group therapy to carry out cognitive reconstruction consciously or unconsciously, build up confidence and ultimately reduce exam anxiety. Compared with receptive music therapy and spontaneous sand tray play in a randomized experimental design, music and sand tray therapy was more effective in relieving test anxiety.

In the study of using sand tray therapy to intervene in academic burnout, Zhu (2016) conducted individual sand tray therapy for 20 middle school students with academic burnout three times, once a week. The treatment process included feeling sand, engaging in the sand

tray play experience, communicating, and other aspects. The researcher found that the level of academic burnout decreased significantly. According to the analysis of individual intervention, sand tray therapy could help the researcher and the participants establish a good relationship, relieve burnout, and rebuild confidence.

Shi (2014) hoped to improve the level of optimism of the subjects, thus improving students' self-efficacy and reducing academic stress. Each week, the researcher did a sand play group session with participants. The themes of the sand play included the designated themes by the researcher, such as my past, my present, and my future, and participants raised some. At the end of the eight sessions, their levels of optimism had improved significantly compared to the control group. However, although participants' self-efficacy and academic stress improved compared to the pretest, there was no significant difference compared to the control group.

In a group counseling study of applying psychodrama to help high school students with academic weariness, the researcher Wei (2019) used psychodrama to help students explore factors that may contribute to academic weariness at the macro-level (family, school, and society) and the micro-level (individual), and help members improve their mood, cognition, and behavior towards academic weariness and enhance their academic motivation. Also, the researcher attached great importance to stimulating the spontaneity and creativity of students with academic weariness through psychodrama, which the researcher believed to be the driving force for the growth of group members. After eight group counseling, the weariness mood had been significantly improved, but it still existed. The researchers believed that the prevention and treatment of weariness required the joint efforts of society, family, school,

individual, and peers and suggested that mental health education should be integrated into the

daily teaching practice to improve and prevent academic weariness fundamentally.

Discussion

Most of the existing studies focused on how family therapy can help adolescents

suffering from academic weariness or school refusal. Simultaneously, there is little research

on how family therapy or creative arts can help adolescents reduce academic stress. Based on

the successful experience of previous studies, family therapy can be of great value in helping

adolescents relieve their academic weariness, which can prevent their academic stress from

developing into academic weariness or even school refusal.

According to the previous effective verbal intervention studies analysis, all researchers

made efforts to improve Chinese parent-child communication and relationship. Personal

factors of academic maladjustments were not focused on by all researchers. They paid much

attention to interpersonal communication. Future research on Chinese students' academic

maladjustment should prioritize interpersonal communication and relationship and examine

how academic maladjustment is arising and kept at the interpersonal level.

Besides, creative arts intervention studies on academic maladjustment mostly focused on

reducing test anxiety or stress, helping adolescents improve their emotional resilience through

creative arts. Most of these were effective. However, they seldom addressed academic

weariness, burnout or school refusal, and the effect of interpersonal communication and

family or school background. Some of these studies mentioned that though participants' stress

or burnout reduced, it still existed. Future research should consider using creative arts to deal

with interpersonal communication and improve it creatively.

An (2006) noted that the reasons for adolescents' academic weariness are complicated, not just related to family structure. Different intervention methods should be adopted for different causes. Shang (2017) also found that narrative therapy requires the client to have a certain level of language expression. When therapists use narrative therapy to help clients with limited verbal expression ability, non-verbal expression media can help clients express their feelings and thoughts. If these can be recorded in some artistic form, the artworks can become an additional member of the witness team and join the therapeutic alliance of the clients. Xu and Zhao (2017) found that the family atmosphere plays an important role in people's mental health and self-esteem of middle school students. Therefore, in family therapy for adolescents, cultivating a positive and healthy family atmosphere is helpful to enhance their self-esteem and thus help them face academic stress. Expressive art therapy has the advantage of creating a family atmosphere while allowing family members to learn specific methods to improve the family atmosphere.

Quan and Pei (2010) suggested that individual therapy and family therapy should be combined to deal with the mental health problems of middle school students. Parents' participation will provide more information, and individual counseling can be considered when middle school students do not want their parents to participate. However, there is family therapy for one person, and people can still talk about family influences. Besides, the researchers also recommended that therapists or counselors should not limit to one therapeutic approach. On the one hand, this is in line with the psychological treatment integration trend; On the other hand, this can help therapists exert the advantages of different therapeutic approaches to deal with different problems.

To address the academic maladjustment of Chinese adolescents, we can consider using brief family therapy combined with focused-oriented expressive arts therapy in individual counseling for adolescents.

Fisch and Schlanger (1999) have summarized the hypothesis and helping the process of brief family therapy as follows: brief family therapy assumes that if a person has no demands, then this person has no problems; One's attempts to solve a problem in vain are part of the problem, which are responses to the problem or others; In the treatment, the therapists invite clients to find their strong appeals and describe the situations in which there are problems, and the coping methods failed. Besides, clients are also asked to consider the situations in which the problems are not problems and find effective coping strategies (exceptions). The point is not to get the visitor to do something, but to break the cycle by stopping their ineffective efforts to deal with the problem. This is especially appropriate for dealing with the negative effects of poor parent-child communication on adolescents or parents and one's relationship with oneself, such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-loathing, or self-care.

In communication with teenagers, it is difficult for them to identify problems and bad coping styles and conceptualize their problems with the help of words. Then, it is necessary to work with them in the framework of brief family therapy utilizing non-verbal methods. Focus-oriented expressive arts therapy invites clients to focus on their inner experience and imagination of a certain problem, make arts, and initiate dialogue with arts that represent the problem. Therapists ask clients to think about the origin of the arts, find the obstacle of solving the problem, and explore how to move in the right direction (Rappaport, 2009).

By combining these two therapies, we can invite the clients to focus on the most

powerful appeal and perceive the inner experience and create this experience into the arts. At the same time, have a dialogue with arts: When would you experience a strong feeling (problem scenario), when would the experience be weak or absent (exception), and how did you and would you react to it (response to the problem). Such dialogue can be verbal or through different arts, which can combine many art forms or switch between different arts.

Combining the two therapies can be mainly applied to help Chinese adolescents improve their self-concept and core self-evaluation, identify the influence of family interaction on self-concept and core self-evaluation, increase emotional resilience and improve their communication parents. However, in Chinese parent-child or teacher-student communication, adolescents are always at a disadvantage in power. Therefore, we can consider using family art therapy or creative family therapy to improve the interaction between parents and children, teachers, and students, and improve family functions.

In family art therapy or creative family therapy, therapists can use the expressive therapies continuum (ETC) to help family members understand and respect each other's way of processing information and reduce conflict (Hinz, 2009). In addition, ETC can also help therapists find appropriate methods and activities for individual cases and families. For example, dealing with students' academic stress or burnout, therapists can start from the kinesthetic/sensory level, which is also the main direction of previous research. Therapists can also use kinesthetic/sensory activities to strengthen the connection between family members, enhance family cohesion, and improve the family atmosphere. Dealing with adolescents with academic weariness can be considered from the perception/emotion level. Family members can see the part behind the academic weariness that they usually do not see

and increase their understanding. For dealing with adolescents with school refusal and family

communication problems, therapists can consider using the cognitive/symbolic level multiple

arts activities to detect the family communication pattern and the resolution model of the

problem conflict.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social Sciences
Expressive Therapies Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Expressive Arts Therapy

Student's Name: Huaxin Wang
Type of Project: Thesis

Title:

Applying Expressive Arts Therapy Interventions with Chinese Adolescents with

Academic Maladjustment

Date of Graduation: May 21, 2022
In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Kelvin Ramirez, PhD, ATR-BC, LCAT