

## Article 38

# **Assessing Creative Approaches in Beginning Counselors: Building the Foundation**

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Creative approaches in counseling can be defined as using techniques involving music, dance and movement, imagery, visual arts, drama and play, and humor (Gladding, 2005). In counseling, creative approaches can be used in various settings (Carson & Becker, 2004). Authors (Bowman & Boone, 1998) have discussed the benefits of using creativity in a group setting, in particular raising self awareness and community development. In fact, compared to more linear approaches to counseling, creative counseling has been described as providing clients different opportunities for bringing thoughts and feelings into awareness, since creative approaches allow clients to express themselves in multiple ways, which can lead to increased awareness of self and others (Gladding, 2005). Creative approaches in counseling allow a client the opportunity to "experience." Authors (Carpenter, 2002) have discussed potential positive outcomes of experiencing for clients, including the notion that experiencing is a powerful teacher, and learning is increased through this mechanism. In addition, clients can access emotions more quickly and in a more authentic way when experiencing. Some of the usual defenses that serve as protective features are not as readily available when experiencing. Creative approaches oftentimes feel playful to clients, so that this way of working is unexpected and unfamiliar to clients so that perhaps clients are more open to the counseling process (Carson & Becker, 2004).

Other benefits of using creative approaches in counseling have been noted (Gladding, 2005) and include offering a new energy to clients. Creative counseling also helps clients become more invested in the counseling process. Presenting concerns have been discussed as more tangible and concrete with the use of creative approaches. Something tangible assists the client in remembering, visualizing, and actively working on a specific struggle. Creative counseling also has been described as multicultural in nature, since using creative approaches such as music, or visual art, can reach many different types of people from various backgrounds (Henderson & Gladding, 1998; Gladding, 2005).

## **Creative Approaches and Counselor Education and Supervision**

Although the use of creativity in counseling has seemingly important benefits, training for creativity within counseling programs is sparse (Carson & Becker, 2004). Literature exists on ways to implement a course on creativity in counseling into a counseling curriculum (Davis, 2008; Gladding, 2005; Smith, 2011; Waliski, 2009; Ziff & Beamish, 2004) and some counseling programs have started to incorporate classes and workshops on creativity in master's level counseling programs. The majority of training, however, is within specialty educational programs that have been established to focus on the creative arts in counseling. These types of programs are found outside of traditional master's level counseling programs and often specialize in a particular art form (e.g., dance and movement therapy or art therapy master's degree programs).

Not only has creativity been discussed as useful in counseling, but also in clinical supervision (Jackson, Muro, Lee, & DeOrnellas, 2008; Koltz, 2008; Newsome, Henderson, & Veach, 2005; Smith, 2009; Wilkins, 1995). Similar benefits have been cited for using creativity in supervision, such as self-awareness (Jackson et al., 2008; Newsome et al., 2005), case conceptualization (Jackson et al., 2008; Smith, 2009) and group cohesion (Newsome et al., 2005). Also, it has been suggested that perhaps some students are better served through using creative techniques rather than more traditional supervision methods (Koltz, 2008). Methods such as sandtray in supervision have demonstrated positive outcomes when using this supervisory technique (Markos, Coker, & Jones, 2008).

In his Creative Therapies Model for group supervision, Wilkins (1995) divides the supervision into three stages. In the first stage, supervisees form dyads. Each pair of students uses visual art to explore their relationships with a particular client with whom they are struggling. After the drawing is complete, one supervisee assumes the role of a client with whom he or she is currently working. The supervisee who acts as the client is encouraged by the supervisor to assume mannerisms, gestures, tone of voice, and posture of the client. The supervisee talks as the client about a given topic in the way that the client would. The other supervisee assumes the role of the counselor and the two enact a counseling session.

Often, supervisees change their perception of clients after engaging in the role play as clients and understand clients' inner worlds and expectations for counselors. In addition, the partner who has assumed the role of the counselor may add valuable insight regarding the counselor, client, or presenting concern.

Counselor educators have used creativity in the classroom. Shepard (2002) used screenwriting techniques in his counseling course to create a fictional character that all students could assume in a role play, and Woodard (1999) used dramatic techniques and assumed the role of a client every week so that students could practice being the counselor. Some authors (Carson & Becker, 2004) have advocated for more training on creativity to take place in master's programs. The authors proposed that barriers exist that do not allow for this training to occur for beginning masters level students who want to use creativity in counseling; that academia and creativity are seen as opposites, and little if any time is allotted for creativity when students are understanding "academic" material such as traditional theories and techniques. The authors suggested that creativity be understood as a fundamental rather than specialty area that one acquires later in a

counseling career after graduating from a counseling training program. Thus, creative approaches should be introduced to counseling students early in training programs when they begin to see clients for the first time. To begin to understand creativity as a fundamental part of counseling, creative approaches should be introduced to counselors at the beginning of training programs.

Although there is some literature on how to incorporate creative approaches in counselor training and supervision, missing from the literature is what counseling students themselves view as important for the training of creativity in counseling. In order to build a foundation of knowledge about counseling students' perceptions of creativity in counseling, the author examined beginning masters' level counselors' thoughts about and use of creativity in counseling. The researcher wished to obtain information in order to add to the current body literature about creativity and counselor training, and build a foundation of knowledge regarding what counseling students' believe about creativity in counselor training. The research questions were as follows:

1. How many beginning counselors used creativity in counseling?
2. Did beginning counselors think that using creativity benefited their clients?
3. Did beginning counselors think that using creativity benefited themselves?
4. What materials would beginning counselors like to have access to in order to use creativity in counseling?
5. Did beginning counselors feel as though they had these materials available to use?
6. Would they have felt more inclined to use creativity if materials had been supplied to them by an in-house clinic at their university?
7. Did beginning counselors know that creative techniques were options to use in counseling?

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Procedures**

A sample of first year masters students ( $n = 27$ ) who were enrolled in a counseling theories course participated in the study. The students had recently completed a practicum where they met with a volunteer client for a total of five 50-minute sessions. The sample was composed of mainly females ( $n = 24$ ) but also included three males. All students were between the ages 22 and 45. Of the sample, 88.9% were Caucasian, 3.7% were African American, and 7.4% were Asian/Asian American. Most of the participants (88.9%) had not had any previous training on creativity in counseling. After all students had completed the practicum component of the course, participants were given the questionnaire during their regular class time and were instructed to fill out the survey to the best of their ability. Students were informed that completing the questionnaire was voluntary and that choosing not to participate would not negatively impact their evaluations in the course.

### **Instrumentation**

To investigate the use of creativity and beginning counseling students, a 19-question survey (Appendix A) approximately three pages in length was developed to gather basic information to explore broad topics about counseling and creative approaches. Since no literature existed that discussed counseling students' perceptions

about using creativity in counseling the instrument was developed with this goal in mind. Of particular importance was whether students had any training, either during the counselor training program, or before entering the training program, on creativity in counseling. Since scholars (Carson & Becker, 2004) had noted that training for creativity was sparse in counselor training, the author wished to examine whether or not this was consistent with the current sample. Further, the author wished to explore whether or not the participants had used creative approaches during their practicum experience. This would supply important information as to whether or not students were using such approaches, despite training on creativity. Finally, questions on the survey examined whether supplies or training would assist participants with using more creative approaches. Answers to this question might suggest how counselor training programs could support students' use of creative approaches. Open-ended questions and Likert-type scales ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" asked students about their thoughts about and use of creativity in counseling. Questions such as: *"I used creative techniques in one or more of my counseling sessions"* were used to examine beginning counselors' use of creativity. Questions such as *"Creative techniques benefited my client"* were used to investigate beginning counselors' beliefs about creativity in counseling. Open ended questions were used to gather contextual information. Examples included: *"How did you feel creativity did or did not benefit your client?"* and *"What supplies would you like to have access to in order to use creativity in counseling?"*

## **Results**

Of the 27 participants, 13 reported that they used creative approaches in one or more counseling sessions with their clients. Out of the 13 who used creativity, 94% reported that the use of creativity benefited their client. In addition, 94% reported that using creativity benefited themselves as counselors. Eighty-nine percent of students would have liked to have had more supplies in order to use creativity. Seventy-eight percent of students reported that they would feel more inclined to use creativity if more supplies were provided to them from the in-house training clinic. The majority of students (96%) reported that they would have been more inclined to use creativity in counseling if they had more training on creative techniques.

Responses to open ended questions related to creative materials highlighted the fact that students would like supplies such as markers, paint, clay, music, and books for bibliotherapy. Responses to open-ended questions related to benefits of using creativity for both clients and counselors suggested that creative techniques assisted clients with talking more openly about a presenting issue or experience. Using creativity benefited the students as a beginning counselor as evidenced by responses indicating creativity kept the counselor focused while in session and assisted with the counselor feeling more confident about their basic skills.

## **Discussion**

What seems interesting from the results is the following: participants who used creative approaches in counseling reported that it benefited both themselves as counselors and their clients. In the opinions of counseling students, then, creativity was an effective

technique in more than one way. Also significant is the notion that counseling students would have felt more inclined to use creativity if supplies were provided by an in-house training clinic. With more supplies on hand, beginning counselors may be more likely to incorporate creativity into their work.

The highest percentage of participants, however, reported that training and education on creative techniques would have made them feel more inclined to use creative techniques in counseling. This seems to suggest that training may have more of an impact on beginning counselors than simply offering supplies to use in their early counseling careers. With the knowledge that training on creativity may benefit beginning counselors, questions involving creativity training and beginning counselors might be: How might counselor education programs integrate creativity into counseling curriculum? Since there are no formal requirements for counseling programs to include creativity into the curriculum, how might this be included into counselor training programs? Creativity training may be something to add to an already established course, such as counseling theories or techniques.

Creativity and counseling could also be a standalone course so that counseling students understand it as a necessary part of their training instead a specialty area. Future research may explore more closely the positive effects of using creativity in counseling for beginning counselors in order to strengthen the rationale for including this into training programs. For example, how do counselor trainees who used creativity in a counseling practicum differ from counseling students who did not use creativity with clients in regards to counseling self-efficacy, or conceptualization skills? With noted benefits for beginning counselors, creativity in counseling may be recognized as more of a fundamental part of training. As this study intended to build a foundation of knowledge regarding counseling students' thoughts about and use of creativity in counseling, future studies can add to the literature by looking more deeply at the benefits of creativity for counseling students.

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## **Appendix A: Creativity in Counseling: Building the Foundation Survey**

Hello,

The following is a short survey to investigate your experience with creativity in counseling. Please use the following definition as you complete the questions:

*Creative techniques in counseling can include imagery, visual arts, literature, drama, play and humor, music, dance, and movement (Gladding, 2005).*

Please answer the following demographic questions:

1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. How would you classify yourself?

- ☐ Rather not say  
☐ Caucasian/White  
☐ African American  
☐ Indigenous or Aboriginal Person  
☐ Asian/Pacific Islander  
☐ Hispanic  
☐ Latino  
☐ Multiracial  
☐ Other

3. What is your age?

4. Have you had any training on creativity in counseling?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. If you have had training on creativity in counseling, what kind of training was it? (Explain the type and length of training). (\*If you have not had training on creativity in counseling, you may skip to Question #7)

6. If you have had training on creativity in counseling do you feel that the training adequately prepared you to use it in counseling? Please explain.

*Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability as they apply to your Counseling Theories practicum experience:*

7. I used creative techniques in one or more of my counseling sessions.  
(\*If you did not use creative techniques, you may skip to Question #11.)

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. If you used creative techniques, what type(s) of creative techniques did you use?

9. Using creative techniques in one or more of my counseling sessions benefited my client.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. Using creative techniques in one or more of my counseling sessions benefited me as a beginning counselor.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. I would have liked to have had more creative supplies, resources, and ideas in order to use creativity during my counseling session(s).

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

12. I feel as though I had adequate creative supplies, resources, and ideas in order to use creativity during my counseling session(s).

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

13. I feel as though I do not have enough training on creative techniques to use them in a counseling session.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

14. I would be more inclined to use creativity in my counseling session(s) if supplies, resources, and ideas were supplied by the Nicholas A. Vacc Counseling and Consulting Clinic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

15. I would be more inclined to use creativity in my counseling session(s) if I had training on creativity in counseling.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree



16. As I participated in the practicum component of CED 620, I knew that creative techniques were options to use during my counseling session(s).

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

17. If you used creative techniques during your counseling session(s), how do you feel creativity did or did not benefit your client? (\*If you did not use creative techniques, you may skip to Question #19.)

18. If you used creativity during your counseling session(s), how do you feel creativity did or did not benefit you as a counselor?

19. What supplies or resources would you like to have access to in order to use creativity in counseling?