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Creative Art in Group: Pedagogical Implications for Integration in Group Counseling Courses

Paper based on a program presented at the 2012 ACES Conferences, Nashville, TN, October 30.

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Counseling literature and research note numerous benefits associated with using creative art in the group counseling setting (Dee, Perkins, & Oden, 2004; Denton, 2006; Korlin, Nyback, & Goldberg, 2000; Odegard & Koltz, 2008; Rogers, 1993; Sommers-Flanagan, 2007); however, absent in the group counseling literature are documented ways to integrate it into one's pedagogy. The authors will address pedagogical implications for integrating creative arts within a group counseling course, as well as describe one creative art activity to integrate in a group counseling course.

Time has shown an increase in the use of creative activities documented in a variety of counselor education venues (Carson & Becker, 2004; Hundley & Casado-Kehoe, 2007; Lahad, 2000; Koltz, 2008; Neswald-McCalip, Sather, Strati, & Dineen, 2003; Odegard & Koltz, 2008). Carson and Becker (2004) contend that creativity is not only vital to the counseling process, but to counselor training, as well. Benefits of creative arts include the process oriented nature, the increase in social interaction, and increased opportunity for self awareness (Gladding & Newsome, 2003). It would seem that incorporating creative arts in the classroom may lead to increased intuitive ability (Carson & Becker, 2004), as well as increased clinical ability through modeling another means to connect with clients that extends beyond traditional talk therapy (Odegard & Koltz, 2008).

Counseling literature and research has suggested that creative art has many benefits in the group counseling setting (Dee, Perkins, & Oden, 2004; Denton, 2006; Korlin, Nyback, and Goldberg, 2000; Odegard & Koltz, 2008; Rogers, 1993; Sommers-

Flanagan, 2007); however, absent are detailed accounts of how to approach this in a group counseling context. The need for increased experiential learning, particularly in didactic courses, has led to the increase in the number of creative art activities implemented in classroom work (Gibson, 2007). The authors will address the definition of creative art, discuss pedagogical implications for integrating creative arts within a group counseling course, and provide a description of a creative art activity- “What’s in the Bag”- to integrate during class.

What Is Creative Art?

When defining creativity, there are numerous definitions available; however, it seems applicable to draw from counseling theory. Carl Rogers (1961) discussed creativity in an entire chapter in his book, *On Becoming a Person*. He defined creative as “the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual...” (p. 350). He went on to say that for something to be considered creative it must result in a discernable, evident, or visible product. Therefore, drawing off of Rogers’ definition, creativity whether in counseling, supervision, or teaching must result in a discernable product that emerges from the process. Using creative arts includes the use of color, art, music, activities, or movement to express thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Rogers, 1993); therefore, it encompasses a broad array of artistic modalities.

Why Should I Integrate Creative Art Into My Pedagogy?

When making pedagogical decisions, such as integrating creative art into coursework, it seems important to consider philosophy of teaching and, perhaps, the purpose of the activity (Gibson, 2007). Questions to ask may include: What are your beliefs about learning and the environment in which education takes place? What is your personal style? For integration of creative arts to be successful, it is important to consider if using it is consistent with one’s philosophy of teaching. Once it has been decided that using creative arts fits within one’s philosophy of teaching, there are three main pedagogical implications to consider: broadening understanding of the counseling context, modeling, and increasing multicultural competencies.

Broadening Understanding of the Counseling Context

Many counselor education programs focus solely on the traditional methods of counseling (i.e., talk therapy); however, many students may find that the traditional methods of counseling may not work with their clientele. The use of creative art has numerous benefits, one of which is the focus on process (Gladding & Newsome, 2003). Often students in their pursuit of being a counselor forget that even with the best strategies and skills, counseling is a process. In addition, the experience and process of emotions evoked by creative art activities contributes to greater awareness and aids students in developing empathetic understanding of the counseling context (Gibson, 2007). Finally, using creative arts in group counseling courses allows for process to naturally unfold, and enables students to actually experience “process” and subsequently receive modeling by the professor regarding how to promote and encourage process in group counseling settings.

Modeling

Hundley and Casado-Kehoe (2007) noted that using creative activities in their supervision of students not only provided opportunity for supervisees to solidify learning during practicum and internship, but also enabled the supervisor to model counseling concepts. Specifically, Hundley and Casado-Kehoe were using a termination activity and in doing so modeled effective termination for their students.

Much like practicum and internship, many group counseling courses have an experiential component in which students experience being both a group member and a group leader. Often students may find themselves working with client populations who do not communicate effectively only using the traditional talk therapy. Experts in the field often suggest that group courses should be taught as a group experience even in the didactic portion of the course (Riva & Korinek, 2004). Riva and Korinek (2004) suggested that a group counseling course should simulate a group experience. Given this directive, integrating creative activities in group courses not only models group skills, but also model how to integrate creative art activities into group work. Often students are interested in creative activities but are unsure how to use them. By using creative art activities during the class, students are afforded opportunities to not only experience the activities, but to learn how to utilize them in a group setting.

Increasing Multicultural Competencies

As discussed earlier, Rogers (1961) defined creativity as a relational product that emerges out of the uniqueness of an individual. Integrating creative arts throughout one's counselor education pedagogy has the potential to increase student multicultural competencies. Utilizing non-traditional methods, such as creative arts, is congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of multicultural counselor training. For example, integrating creative modes into one's pedagogy provides facilitation of multiple learning styles and student contexts. Consequently, it also allows the counselor educator to focus on facilitating student understanding of the complex social situations of their clients via multiple mediums (Sue & Sue, 2008). Furthermore, integrating traditional teaching modes into one's pedagogy assumes a linear model of student learning while non-traditional modes model creative ways for students to interact with their clients. This modeling facilitates verbal and non-verbal dialogues which are also congruent with the principles of multicultural counseling. Altogether, integrating creative arts throughout one's group counseling course facilitates student multicultural competencies because it provides a rich lens for students to operate from as well as allows them to facilitate multifaceted interventions in their work with clients.

In addition, creative arts can be considered a multicultural intervention as using it appeals to a broader perspective regarding relationships and life meaning (Molina, Monteiro-Leitner, Garrett, & Gladding, 2006). Meaning is a concept that has a broad implication with regard to multicultural counseling. The next section will provide an example of an activity which has been in existence in various adaptations for quite some time. The authors have added their own variation to this activity for integration into a group counseling course.

What Is in the Bag? A Group Course Activity

Typically, when designing a group counseling course one would attend not only to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2009) requirements, but also the design and organization of the experiential aspect of the course. The principles of group dynamics and group development theory were considered when designing this activity. Johari's window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) is a concept often addressed in a group counseling course to teach what a group leader would hope to facilitate during group counseling-- an increase of group members awareness of blindspots and, simultaneously, an increase in risk-taking through self-disclosure. Students often seem to understand Johari's window cognitively; however, we wanted to develop an activity that demonstrated Johari's window. Therefore, we created a paper bag metaphor to demonstrate Johari's window during class. The following list of materials is needed for this activity: brown paper bag (either lunch bag size or shopping bag size), magazine and/or newspaper clippings, markers, and glue. This creative activity has two variations that may be used in class. Both variations will be described.

Variation 1

The instructor should instruct the students to take their paper bag and assume that it is a representation of the Johari's Window. On the outside of the bag the students are encouraged to glue clippings from magazines or newspapers that depict the information that they do not mind sharing, information that they are "open" with representing the open area in Johari's Window. However, on the inside of the bag students are encouraged to depict the part of the self that they keep hidden: feelings they are fearful of showing to classmates or significant others, thoughts they don't share, information or history that they keep hidden. The instructor should tell students that they will not be asked to share what is inside of the bag. Once the students are done creating their paper bag the instructor can use the following process questions in either a large group or small group format.

- 1) What was this experience like for you?
- 2) As your comfort level allows, please share your created work.
- 3) What are some of your reactions to others' responses/sharing?
- 4) After listening to the responses of group members, what are some of your reactions?
- 5) What would be needed for you to share what is inside of your bag?

By asking the questions above, the instructor is modeling for students how to use a creative art activity, as well as increasing student understanding of Johari's Window and the notion of risk-taking and self disclosure in the group context. The instructor should encourage discussion of how to facilitate trust in the group context. In addition to providing an opportunity to discuss self-disclosure, another variation of the paper bag can be used to discuss the blindspot coordinate of Johari's Window.

Variation 2

For this variation, students are asked to get into small groups. If your course already divides students into training groups for an experiential portion of class, it may be

helpful to divide the class up in this manner, but not necessary. Students are asked to collectively design one large paper bag (a grocery bag is useful for this). Students, again, are directed to use magazine clippings, newspaper, etc. to define what group members collectively believed they show openly during their group time on the outside of the bag. They should work together to construct the bag. On the inside of the bag, participants are encouraged to depict what each person believes group members keep hidden. It is not necessary for each student to share what he/she put in the bag. For example, in one group that we facilitated using this activity, one group member put a pair of ice skates in the bag. He gave his group feedback that he believed that they were skating on the surface and not really going deep with each other. While in this example a student decided to share, it seems important for the instructor to remind students that while they are encouraged to share what they placed inside, they do not have to. Once each group is done with their bag, the following questions can be used to process:

- 1) What was this collaborative creative experience like for you?
- 2) How did you decide what went inside the bag? Outside the bag?
- 3) What do you think are some areas of growth for the group?
- 4) What would you need to take a risk and give your group members feedback regarding what is inside the bag?

Again, these questions have a two-fold purpose. First, to demonstrate and model for students how to facilitate a creative art activity in a group setting, but to also provide an experiential means to demonstrate an important group concept-- risk-taking and giving feedback regarding blind spots.

Summary

Overall, this activity can be utilized in a variety of group contexts to bring enhancement of individual awareness, safety, and connection into group counseling by providing a creative demonstration of Johari's Window. In addition, it provides counselor educators the opportunity to teach students how to model these components in their work as group counselors. Riva and Korinek (2004) make a case for intentionally modeling effective group leader behaviors and skills in the classroom during the didactic portion. Given this directive, the above activity provides one example of how counselor educators could use a creative art activity during the didactic portion of the class. In fact, Riva and Korinek encouraged using beginning group exercises in the classroom to facilitate trust. Students get an opportunity to discuss and potentially facilitate the formation of trust using the "What's in the Bag" activity.

Recommendations

The "What's in the Bag" activity is one activity from an eight week qualitative study we conducted (Odegard & Koltz, 2008). The study found that integrating creative arts in the group process increased awareness, connection, and safety on the part of group members. There is little research and literature that discusses how to integrate creative arts into one's pedagogy. This seems important as educators act as models for students regarding how to behave and interact with clients as identified by Riva and Korinek

(2004). Future studies may want to focus on whether utilizing creative arts during a group counseling experience increases student skill and competency when using this with their own clients. While creative arts are not mentioned in the student learning outcomes outlined in the CACREP 2009 standards, it would seem that the profession is focusing more on student skill and competencies. Research does suggest that utilizing creative means of communication is powerful and effective with clients (Dee et al., 2004; Denton, 2006; Korlin et al., 2000; Koltz, 2008; Rogers, 1993; Sommers-Flanagan, 2007); therefore, the next step may be to research the efficacy of modeling and using experiential activities in the classroom as a means to facilitate skill development and competency.

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Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm