

Creative Approaches to School Counseling: Using the Visual Expressive Arts as an Intervention

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of creative arts in school counseling. There is a specific focus on the use of visual arts, particularly such methods as drawing and painting. Existing literature, which supports the use of art in school counseling, provides the paper's rationale. In addition, the paper explores different art techniques that school counselors can utilize.

Keywords: creative arts in school counseling, school counseling and art

The use of expressive arts in counseling has changed since its roots in psychoanalytic theory prominent during the 1940's (Kahn, 1999). Initially, therapists used art therapy as a psychoanalytic tool to analyze and interpret the meanings of client art. The focus was on the unconscious and free association. Since the 1940's, both goals and focus of art in counseling has changed from a psychoanalytic stance to one which supports the ego, fosters the development of identity, and promotes maturation. School counselors may feel less inhibited using art as an intervention in counseling as they discover that there is not a need for in depth interpretation of a student's work.

Sketching, drawing, and painting can be used as a tool for counselors as it allows students to visually express and release their emotions as well as enhance overall health and well-being (Malchiodi, 1998). Students who have difficulty talking about embarrassing or traumatic life events such as family violence and abuse can express

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themselves through an artistic medium (Trowbridge, 1995). Art allows for the visual representation of thoughts, which may be difficult to express. For example, a child may have difficulty finding the words to express anger, yet by drawing a volcano and identifying with the “explosion,” the child releases anger. Counselors can use art to help clients resolve emotional issues, foster self-awareness, develop social skills, manage behavior, reduce anxiety, solve problems, and increase self-esteem. The creation of art serves to organize thoughts and feelings into something visual (Malchiodi, 2005).

Because various cultures express creativity differently, school counselors may find the use of creative arts appropriate with multicultural students (Gladding, 1992). According to Molina, Monteiro-Leitner, Garrett, and Gladding (2008), creativity and the creative arts are important across cultures and assist in discovery of meaning and connection. The use of art in counseling usually promotes communication, which may lead to an increase in the counselor’s effectiveness (Arnheim, 1990).

School counselors may find the use of art particularly helpful because it is both a verbal and nonverbal technique (Malchiodi, 2005). Younger children may not be able to verbalize their concerns and may use art as a method of nonverbal communication (Orton, 1997). Some counselors believe that the use of expressive therapeutic techniques offers as much value as verbal reflection about an experience. Landreth (2002), a well-known play therapist pioneer, states that this is particularly true for young children who do not have the verbal capabilities of reflection through language. Because it is easier for some children to express themselves visually rather than verbally, the use of art seems to help children improve both their cognitive abilities and social skills (International Art Therapy Organization, 2010). Counselors may find the use of art as a nonverbal technique particularly useful with children who lack the ability to express their emotional selves verbally (Landreth).

School counselors may also find the use of expressive arts helpful with informal assessment of students. Specialized training is necessary for formal interpretation of assessments (Carmichael, 2006) such as the *House-Tree-Person*, *Kinetic Family Drawing*, and *Human Figure Drawing*. The use of projective drawing techniques

in mental health assessment is recent (Burns, 1987). Although not expected to be experts in interpretations of such drawing assessments, counselors can have skill in providing enough interpretation to know when students need outside services (Oster & Gould, 1987). For example, if a student’s perception of relationships and proportions, lights, shadows, and edges is grossly exaggerated and the counselor is aware of extreme familial or personal issues that the student is experiencing, the counselor may feel the need to refer that student for outside services (Gladding, 2006).

Art is an ideal intervention in school counseling because materials are so readily available. Basic supplies such as paper to draw on and crayons or markers are easy to get for even the most budget-restricted counselor. Though an extensive supply of art materials would certainly be great to have, it is not necessary for the use of art in counseling to be effective. A school counselor’s set-up could consist of as little as sheets of printer paper (even the backs of old handouts if paper is rationed), and a few markers or crayons. The use of art in school counseling is appropriate for any developmental age. If a child is able to grip a crayon or smear finger paint, they would be able to benefit from art in counseling. School counselors could use art with students who have a variety of needs such as learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), and behavioral and emotional disorders. Not only is art in counseling applicable to a wide range of students, most any theoretical perspective provides opportunities to adapt art as a tool. Client-centered, behavioral, cognitive, and solution focused counseling styles can all be enhanced using art (Kahn, 1999).

In addition to accessibility and ease in setup, school counselors can use art at various stages in the counseling process. Kahn (1999) suggests how to incorporate art into a three-stage model of counseling. For example, in the entry stage of counseling, counselors may encourage the student to make collages to describe feelings. In the exploration stage, the student may present an area of difficulty that is more important than those presented in the entry stage of counseling. At this stage, a student might create a collage that depicts an understanding of why he/she is coming to counseling. Finally, in the action stage, the task would be to draw a scene five years from now and identify the goals needed to reach this scene. These are

just a few examples of art techniques that counseling can incorporate.

According to the National Coalition of Creative Arts Associations (2004), expressive therapies include art, music, dance/movement, drama, and poetry/creative writing. Through art, children are better able to communicate with adults, express strong feelings and externalize problems, and develop solutions (Mooney, 2000). Many school counselors may need additional tools to deal with the emotional and behavioral issues of children. Finn (2003) stated that children are able to exert some control over their lives with art and drawing and are better able to cope with daily stressors.

Incorporating art into counseling is another tool for professional school counselors to use to enhance a child's life. Using art can promote children's growth and development of self-understanding; these steps may improve in children's overall quality of life (Gladding, 2006). Creativity in counseling has the potential to influence students' lives in ways that traditional therapies do not (Malchiodi, 2005). With expressive arts, students can use their imaginations in productive and corrective ways; expressive arts provide students with another outlet to express themselves and facilitate self-discovery, change, and healing (Gladding, 1992).

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African American Women Counselors, Wellness, and Spirituality

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Abstract

Given their tremendous professional responsibilities, professional counselors face daunting challenges to remaining healthy and avoiding role stress and overload. This article explores the intersection of race, gender, wellness, and spirituality in the self-care of African American women counselors. The authors give particular attention to culture, imbedded societal images of African American women, and the affirming role of spirituality.

Keywords: counselors, wellness, self-care, spirituality, and African American women

Counseling professionals—as reflective helping practitioners—have a tremendous impact on those they serve. Undisputedly, the profession places great demands on its practitioners. Although demanding, the rewards of establishing a helping relationship and effectively using helping skills can motivate counselors to stay in the profession. Appropriate application of theoretical frameworks has helped counselees cope, achieve goals, change behaviors, and in some cases, choose life. With so much hinging on the helping relationship, it is important that professional school counselors do what is possible to protect and nourish their lives. Self-care, then, remains critical to the effectiveness of professional counselors.

The potential for stressors to negatively affect the counseling relationship and undermine the work of counselors always looms. For African American female counselors, the cultural ethos of caring can add weight to professional responsibilities of empathy and compassion. The literature documents the need for self-care planning among counselors in general. However, the intersection between counselor preparation, health, wellness, and