

# Introduction

As counseling practitioners, we have all had the experience of being at a loss for words. In fact, I have a vivid recollection of one of my first days on the job as an elementary counselor. I had gone into a fourth-grade classroom to explain who I was and what elementary counselors did. "Counselors help children with problems they might have, such as not getting along with friends or parents, fighting with brothers and sisters, or worrying about doing well in school," I said. Immediately, a hand shot up, and an adorable boy with curly blond hair said, rapidly, "My mom has been married three times and my dad has been married twice, and now they are getting a divorce. Is this a problem?" I have to admit his question really took me by surprise because problems like this were not very common in the early 1970s in the community in which I was working. Consequently, in my counseling internships I had dealt only with typical developmental problems. I literally was at a loss for words, but obviously I couldn't dodge the bullet, so I took a deep breath and said, "Yes, this is something I can help you with. Let's talk after recess."

Our first counseling session became one of many throughout the year, and although Erik seemed to feel better each time we talked, I felt frustrated because I didn't have a magic wand to wave that would make his situation better. I felt inadequate because I wanted to be more helpful, but I hadn't really been trained to do anything except listen and nod my head and occasionally employ a few behavioral techniques as needed. Back then, counselors didn't really have a "toolbox" of techniques, and there wasn't much difference between the interventions used with adults and those used with children and adolescents. Fortunately, counseling young clients is much different today. The profession has gradually recognized that adult models of assessment and intervention should not be extrapolated to children and adolescents because, in many respects, counseling children and adolescents is quite different from counseling adults. In contrast to the "listen and nod" model, counselors who now work with youth also incorporate a wide array of creative arts interventions that enrich the counseling process in numerous ways.

As Gladding (2011) notes, "Counseling is a creative process that focuses on helping clients make developmentally appropriate choices

and changes distinctive to their concerns and situations" (p. vii). When creative or expressive arts interventions such as music, movement, writing, literature, drama, play, and games are incorporated into the counseling process, clients of all ages, but particularly children and adolescents, experience the counseling process in a way that enhances the outcome. These types of interventions are more stimulating and meaningful, helping clients gain new perspectives and skills to address both typical developmental problems and more serious issues: parental divorce and substance abuse, poverty and homelessness, eating disorders and self-injury, violence and sexual abuse, teen pregnancy and chronic illness, and so forth. The unfortunate reality is that far too many children and adolescents must contend with issues such as these, in addition to the typical developmental challenges they experience, as they navigate childhood and adolescence.

## **RATIONALE FOR USING CREATIVE ARTS INTERVENTIONS**

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The counseling profession is now acknowledging that for many clients who seem relatively unaffected by the counseling process, standard techniques alone are inadequate. This profession has been dominated primarily by verbal approaches that are insufficient for clients who may be reluctant or nonverbal or who speak different languages. Consequently, over the years the practice of incorporating creative or expressive arts interventions into the counseling process has become much more popular with a wide variety of populations (Degges-White & Davis, 2011; Malchiodi, 2005).

Degges-White and Davis (2011) stress that "the expressive arts are exceptional in their effectiveness for individuals who represent a wide array of diversities and differences" (p. 4). And because of the universal nature of the creative arts, they can be used with any client, "regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability, age, language, cultural identity, or physical functioning" (p. 5). Expressive arts approaches, like verbal therapies, attempt to facilitate change and problem solving, as well as increase well-being. Furthermore, using nontraditional approaches can expedite diagnosis, prevention, and intervention.

As opposed to more traditional "talk" methods of counseling, creative arts interventions get clients "doing," which helps them experience things from different perspectives and enhances emotional, social, and behavioral growth. Deviating from more traditional counseling approaches increases the probability that the counselor and client will connect in a more meaningful manner, which in turn results in more effective outcomes.

There are several reasons that creative arts interventions are effective with children and adolescents, as described in the follow-

ing "Top 12 Reasons for Using Creative Arts in Counseling Children and Adolescents":

1. First, children and adolescents are often referred by others, so they may be resistant, reluctant, or anxious about engaging in the counseling process. Imagine being six years old and going to a mental health counselor because your father just abandoned the family. Suppose the counselor asks you how you feel about your dad moving across the country. Perhaps you can't put your feelings into words, and you might not trust this person that you have never met before, so you just clam up and say nothing. But suppose the counselor first puts you at ease by introducing herself through a puppet or suggesting that the two of you play a game to get better acquainted. Wouldn't you feel much more comfortable?
2. Another reason to use creative arts interventions relates to developmental considerations. Because thinking gradually progresses from concrete to abstract, it is essential to employ interventions that are more concrete, even with adolescents, because many youth do not achieve formal operational (abstract) thinking until later in adolescence (Vernon, 2009). Consider the difference between just talking to a 13-year-old girl about emotional ups and downs and sharing a story written by another teenager about riding the emotional roller coaster. When I used the exercise "Like a Yo-Yo" (Vernon, 1998b, p. 185) with my client, she immediately said that this was exactly how she felt and proceeded to give me a more detailed description of her up and down moods. Reading the story enhanced her understanding of what she was experiencing and facilitated her self-disclosure.
3. Anyone working with children in particular knows that their attention spans are limited, so it is much more effective to use interventions that are motivating and engaging. I remember that during my first year as an elementary counselor it was difficult to bring my language down to the level of a seven-year-old who had anger management problems, but it was also challenging to keep him focused during the counseling session. I didn't have many techniques in my toolbox in those days, but now I know how much more effective it would have been to read *Moody Cow Meditates* (MacLean, 2009), a story about how the moody cow used his mind jar to reduce his anger, or to play a hopscotch game called "Adios Anger" (Vernon, 2009, p. 206) to help this child identify ways to manage his anger.
4. Children's ability to remember concepts between sessions may also be limited, and for this reason, creative arts interventions, which are more concrete, are especially effective. Engaging clients in the session through music, games, art, or metaphors helps anchor the concepts in their heads. I recall working with

a 16-year-old who was very upset that his girlfriend hadn't called him the previous night as she had promised. In his mind, she didn't call because she no longer cared about him, she most likely had been out with someone else, and she would probably break up with him. His overgeneralizations blew the problem way out of proportion, and he was unable to entertain the notion that there might have been other reasons that prevented her from calling. As he talked about the problem, he was staring out the window, where there was a bug zapper hanging from the tree. I asked him to imagine that his head was a giant bug zapper and that it "zapped" the negative thoughts before they entered his brain and became entrenched. In this way, he would be more likely to look just at the fact, which was that she hadn't called him, rather than make assumptions. This metaphor was exceptionally helpful to him, and he continued to use it throughout adolescence, in college, and even as a newly married young man! The fact that he had a concrete image facilitated his ability to think more clearly and deal more effectively with his problems.

5. Another compelling reason to use creative arts interventions is that, because of the variety of techniques, it is very easy to address different learning styles. Whereas traditional counseling is characterized by a verbal/auditory approach that can be very limiting, creative arts interventions are visual and kinesthetic in addition to being auditory and verbal. With clients who learn best by doing, engaging them in a role-play, a game, or music and movement is much more effective than just talking. Indeed, in schools, very often the clients who are referred to a school counselor are those whose learning styles are more kinesthetic and tactile as opposed to auditory or visual. These students often experience behavior problems in the classroom due to the fact that most learning environments are structured for the more dominant visual/auditory learner. I remember working with eight-year-old Marcus, who figuratively bounced off the walls when he entered my office after school. I quickly learned that the most effective way to work on his behavior problems was to have him do something active, such as tossing a beanbag into a red bucket if he thought the scenarios I read illustrated positive classroom behaviors or acting out positive and negative ways of responding to his teacher's requests.
6. Not only are creative arts interventions effective in addressing various learning styles, they are also very culturally responsive. As Gladding (2011) states, "The creative arts are truly global and relevant to counselors from multiple settings and backgrounds" (p. ix). This relevance applies to clients from diverse backgrounds as well. Because of the ethnic and racial changes in the fabric of our society, being culturally responsive is impera-

tive. It is a given that clients from diverse cultural backgrounds respond well to the creative arts. For example, the Latino culture uses *cuentos* (short stories) to teach values and social principles, as well as to increase self-esteem and achievement (Ramirez, Jain, Flores-Torres, Perez, & Carlson, 2009). The visual arts also transcend culture and have been used throughout time, as evidenced by ancient cave drawings and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Gladding notes that creative arts interventions that are culturally appropriate help clients develop self-awareness as they learn to express themselves in symbolic ways and that concrete experiences give clients something that helps them relate better to themselves and others.

7. A further reason for employing creative arts interventions with young clients is that they facilitate expression of concerns that may be difficult for them to express. Imagine that you are a five-year-old whose mother just had a baby. You might not be able to tell your counselor how you feel about this, but when he takes you to a play area with a playhouse, dolls, baby strollers, and so forth, you immediately begin to convey how you are feeling about this new addition to your family. Art, music, bibliotherapy, and play techniques are very useful in facilitating expression of concerns that may be hard to articulate, especially for younger children.
8. Creative arts techniques are more interactive, which is very important with children and adolescents, who often need more incentive to engage in the counseling process. I remember working with a very resistant 12-year-old, who sat and stared out the window while I floundered around trying to get a sense of what I could do to help her. It didn't take me long to realize that the "talk and nod" approach wasn't working because I was the only one talking and she wasn't nodding! The one thing I had learned very well over the years was that when something isn't working, don't do more of the same, so I brought out the checkerboard and invited her to play with me, adding that before either one of us could make a move, we had to draw a card from a box and complete an unfinished sentence written on it. The interaction during the game facilitated self-disclosure, as well as helping us to develop rapport.
9. The "hands-on" approach that characterizes many of the creative arts interventions has more impact and is more meaningful than talk. Rather than talking about perfectionism with an eight-year-old, I gave him a tennis ball and asked him to juggle first one, then two, then three balls. After trying this experiment, we then talked about how difficult it was to do this and that it would be hard for almost anyone to do it perfectly. This conversation segued into a discussion about his issues with perfectionism.

10. Especially when working with younger clients, have you ever felt that they were lost or overwhelmed by words? Many times a mismatch occurs when the counselor relies too much on talking. Clients might not be proficient in the language, either because of diversity factors or developmental limitations. Integrating the creative expressive arts into counseling has limitless possibilities for overcoming this mismatch.
11. Being a counselor can be incredibly rewarding, but it is also hard work. It is easy to get overinvolved with your clients' problems. Furthermore, many counselors don't know how to say no, and they try to help everyone who needs it, often at the expense of their own needs. Burnout is not uncommon in this profession, but using creative arts techniques can help prevent this from occurring because the counseling sessions are more engaging and the variety puts some spice into the process.
12. Although all of the preceding reasons justify the use of the creative arts in counseling, we would be remiss not to mention that they are more engaging for both client and counselor! Of course counseling is serious work, but it can also be fun. Years ago I worked with a teenager who had been referred by her teacher because she had horrendous problems with procrastination. Although she was very bright, her grades did not reflect this because she simply did not turn in assignments. During one session I had her pretend that she was the president of the Procrastinators Club. As president, her job was to recruit nonprocrastinators to join her organization. To do that, she needed to make up a brochure listing all the advantages of being a procrastinator. At first she resisted, but I assured her that this could be fun. Once she started thinking of reasons to join, she really got into it. Then I asked her to imagine that she actually was not a procrastinator and that as president of the Non-Procrastinators Club she needed to recruit the procrastinators by coming up with compelling reasons why it is best *not* to procrastinate. After she shared both sets of reasons, I then asked her to make a list of things she procrastinated about. Once that was complete, I asked her to lie down on the floor, and as I read off each item on her list, I placed a large pile of newspapers on her chest to symbolize how things "build up" when you procrastinate. After asking her how she felt under this pile of procrastination, I then told her that she could reduce the pile by identifying something that she could think or do to overcome her reasons for procrastinating. We both ended up laughing throughout the session, and the "out of the box" intervention made the point.

In summary, effective interventions follow the "innovative model," developed by Vernon:

- I = Innovative
- N = Need to match the client's learning style
- T = Target the identified problem
- E = Engaging and energizing for the client
- R = Relate to the client's culture and developmental level
- V = Varied, to keep clients motivated
- E = Educational and skill oriented
- N = Need to facilitate change
- T = Teach emotional and behavioral self-control
- I = Interesting and intriguing
- O = Out of the ordinary, as in the creative arts
- N = Nontraditional, as in the creative arts

## OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

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The purpose of this book is to facilitate understanding and application of the creative arts in counseling, with specific applications with children and adolescents. Each chapter presents an overview of one of seven creative arts approaches, with numerous examples and suggestions for incorporating each approach with other expressive arts modalities. The following areas are described:

1. Play and games
2. Music
3. Visual arts
4. Expressive writing
5. Literature
6. Drama
7. Activity-based experiential interventions

Following each introductory section, which I wrote, related interventions developed by myself and my coauthor, Kathryn Barry, are presented for specific age groups: elementary, middle school, and high school. There are three interventions for each age group, as well as three for small-group or classroom settings, for a total of 84 interventions. Specific interventions are presented on separate pages in an easy-to-read format that includes the topic addressed, a brief rationale, materials needed, and a step-by-step procedure for implementing the intervention. These interventions address a wide variety of topics, such as dealing with anxiety, anger, depression, underachievement, bullying, peer relationships, self-awareness, behavior awareness, problem solving, goal setting, and much more. For each chapter, the expanded table of contents indicates the developmental

level and topic area, providing easy access for counselors looking for a specific topic suitable for a client of a certain age.

Many of these interventions have been used with clients in both mental health and school settings. Experience tells us that these methods work and that clients are more invested in the counseling process when these types of techniques are used. Although these methods are engaging and fun for both client and counselor, it is important to point out that the counseling session is not just "fun and games"; these interventions target specific problems and have been developed to increase the young client's ability to more effectively address both developmental and more serious situational problems.

The last chapter of the book presents nine case studies based on actual clients' problems, with names and other information changed to protect their identity. There are three case studies for the elementary level, three for middle school, and three for high school. Practicing school and mental health counselors have contributed the case studies and background information. I developed interventions to address the targeted problems for each case study, using all seven creative arts approaches in each case to illustrate the versatility and wide applicability of this method of counseling.

*Counseling Outside the Lines* is intended for school and mental health counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and family counselors who work with children and adolescents and are searching for unique and effective interventions to employ with this population. It should also be an invaluable resource for graduate students who want to enhance their expertise and leave their program with a plethora of techniques to use with future clients. It is our hope that the practical information and the numerous interventions presented in this publication will be welcome additions to counselors' toolboxes and that the strategies will be motivating for young clients. As Jacobs (1992) has noted, counseling is a creative process that *can* be and *needs* to be more than just talking. Start "doing" by reading more about counseling and creative arts applications with children and adolescents.