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## Magazine Picture Collage in Group Supervision Le collage de photos de magazine en supervision de groupe

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### ABSTRACT

A magazine picture collage activity was used with three female counsellor education students as a vehicle to support them in processing their experience as counsellors in training. The use of magazine picture collage in group supervision is described, and the benefits and challenges are presented. The collages served as jumping-off points for group discussions on developing a sense of competency, a quest for answers, discovering their strengths, finding personal and professional balance, and moving towards the realities of the counselling profession. Collage work can provide an alternate medium in supervision to develop reflective analysis and self-exploration.

### RÉSUMÉ

On a employé le collage de photos tirées de magazines comme moyen d'aider 3 étudiantes en counseling à décortiquer leur expérience de conseillères en formation. L'emploi du collage de photos de magazines en supervision de groupe y est décrit et l'on en présente les avantages et les défis. Les collages ont servi d'amorces aux discussions de groupe sur le développement d'un sentiment de compétence, la recherche de réponses, la découverte des points forts, la conciliation entre vie personnelle et vie professionnelle et le cheminement vers la réalité de la profession de conseiller. Le travail de collage peut fournir un nouveau type de support en supervision permettant de favoriser l'analyse réflexive et l'autorévélation.

Art work has been used for many years to assist individuals in exploring values, perceptions, and emotions. The use of the expressive arts in therapy is based on the belief that the creative process involved in the making of art is healing and life-enhancing (Rubin, 2001). Expressive therapies offer nonverbal ways to express feelings that are difficult to put into words or even coherent thoughts. Creative therapies can provide a safe emotional outlet that allows individuals to gain personal insights and to move forward psychologically (Rubin, 2001). Other benefits include an increase in personal awareness, a means to mitigate emotional responses to stress, an opportunity to express deeper personal meanings, and the provision of a container for unpleasant emotions (Neswald-McCalip, Sather, Vigil-Strati, & Dineen, 2003; Newsome, Henderson, & Veach, 2005; Wilkins, 1995; Wong-Wylie, 2006).

While conducting research on counsellor identity development with master's level students, we noted how art-based activities, and in particular collage, were beneficial in supporting students to process their experience as counsellors in training. The focus of this article is on the collage activity as a vehicle for supervisees to express their development as practitioners within a group supervision format. Prior to describing the collage activity, we briefly review the utilization of art-based practices in group supervision.

#### USE OF EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN GROUP SUPERVISION

A number of studies have upheld the benefits of group supervision for students as cost-efficient, time-efficient, and clinically rich (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Borders, 2007; Ray & Altekruze, 2000). Benefits as outlined by Bernard and Goodyear (2004) include avoiding counselling student dependence, opportunities for vicarious learning, diminishing the hierarchical issues between the supervisor and the counselling student, increasing the variety of behavioural and experiential supervision strategies, and helping alleviate the sense of intellectual and emotional isolation felt by beginning counsellors. Group supervision provides the opportunity for peers to interact more openly and to offer support to one another in their growth.

When expressive-arts-based methods are employed in a group setting, a special kind of creative energy may be activated and circulated within the group, taking group members to places they may not have gotten to on their own (Malchiodi, 2002; Wilkins, 1995). "The use of creative approaches to supervision opens channels to the intuitive faculties of the supervisees. They allow a greater spontaneity and the opportunity to convey deep personal meanings in a way which other approaches may not" (Wilkins, 1995, p. 257).

McCalip (2000) describes the potential benefits of creative work in meeting the needs of developing counsellors. She cites supervision techniques by Costa, who used family sculpting and role play in marriage and family programs to assist trainees in responding to diverse client situations. McCalip also notes how Lett integrated simultaneous drawing with talking to encourage self-awareness in trainees. The combination of dialogue with drawing promoted an in-depth exploration of the client-counsellor relationship. Du Preez and Roos (2008) explored the development of counsellor identity through a series of visual projects that they found increased trainees' capacity to reflect on themselves and increased their level of self-knowledge. Group supervision using expressive arts materials can provide opportunities to share and discuss metaphorical representations with peers and supervisors and potentially to open up new avenues for discussion.

#### MAGAZINE PICTURE COLLAGE ACTIVITY

Collage is an art form in which images and/or objects are combined in one piece of artwork. The term "collage" comes from the French word *coller*, which

means “to paste” (Harrison, 2003). Creating collage can be a freeing and playful experience, as there are no rules. The art form is ideal for those people who are not gifted in drawing or sculpting. Collage has been described as a right-brain random-abstract activity. In a left-brained linear world, collage can help people escape boundaries and look beyond limitations (Harrison, 2003).

The use of magazine picture collage is well established in educational settings (Seymour 1995; Williams, 2000) and has been used within the clinical nursing supervision relationship (Williams, 2000). The approach requires no art or art therapy skills by the supervisor; the materials are familiar, inexpensive, and readily available; and the method is suitable for administering in a group setting. For practicum students this form of art may lessen anxiety as it is “a non-threatening medium where an individual does not need to feel ‘artistic’ in producing their piece of work” (Williams, 2000, p. 274). The pictures are already created, and the individual is only required to place them on poster board until satisfied with the composition.

Magazine picture collage offers an opportunity to engage in an extremely rich, visual, kinesthetic experience as participants move shapes, colours, words, and images on the poster board before gluing them in place. Materials required include a variety of colourful magazines with a variety of images (e.g., food, animals, people, landscapes, flowers, phrases), a glue stick, scissors, and a poster board. Williams (2000) found that this medium generated reflective questioning from which to explore issues and perceptions among nursing students. He viewed the magazine collage as a “metaphorical representation of events and influences through which the supervisee can ‘see’ their situation from different perspectives” (p. 273).

#### THE COLLAGE ACTIVITY

Three female practicum students who had received group supervision in their first term using a variety of activities including drawings, grounding activities, and journal reflections under the direction of the second author volunteered to continue with group supervision that focused on their development as counsellors as part of a small research project. They met with the second author at the end of their first field-based practicum and at the beginning and end of the two-term practicum in their second year for a total of three sessions. Although a variety of art-based approaches were used in the research project, supervisees reported in the course of a research study that the magazine picture collage was the most helpful exercise in processing their experiences as developing counsellors.

Each session followed the same format. Students signed consent forms as part of the research project of which these activities were a part. They were then asked to create a collage that “represents your interpretation of where you are at right now as a counsellor in training.” Supervisees took turns describing their collages and followed that with a group discussion about the process of becoming a counsellor and the issues faced as displayed in their collages. After digitally photographing their collages, the session ended with a brief check-out.

In the second and third meeting, supervisees were also asked to reflect on their previously made collages in response to the questions “When you look at what you created at that moment in time, what do you think about what it had to say about your experience as a counsellor in training? How do you think and feel about that message now?” The circling back process of reviewing past collages in light of the present collage served as a counterpoint to the current self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), allowing personal assessment of progress made toward becoming a counsellor.

In each session, supervisees were given about 30 minutes to select images, pictures, and slogans from a large number and variety of magazine pictures and to assemble and glue them onto a poster board in response to the request to represent their experiences as a counsellor in training at this moment in time. During the creation of their collages, group members worked in silence as they became absorbed in their task. However, once the collage was completed, each member talked about their representation while the supervisor and other members actively listened. Individuals often focused on a particular image, but at other times every image was discussed as equally important. As the story unfolded, the supervisor noted any themes that emerged and encouraged group members to ask clarifying and reflective questions. As Williams (2000) noted, collage work acts “as a trigger or series of triggers which heighten awareness of values and which clarify relationships of the images as the discussion unfolds” (p. 276).

#### TINA'S COLLAGES

Three of Tina's collages provide an example of how collage was used to express her experience as a counsellor in training over a period of 18 months (Figures 1, 2, and 3). The accounts of these collages include a distillation of her words along with direct quotations. Ellipses are used to indicate omitted information.

Central figures in the collage in Figure 1 are the three blackbirds. Tina feels like a baby bird as she completes her first practicum. “The fear is about needing so much . . . nourishment, information. The faculty are the mother birds and they are withholding what I need.” The information and skills she needs are not being delivered fast enough by faculty members, and she fears she will not have enough skill to avoid harming her clients. There is so much to learn. The images of the dress and scales are reminders to Tina that she is not engaging in self-care. Near the beginning of the program, Tina believes she can draw on her inner strength, represented by the goddess. “I surround this image with the image of a grown bird. I will make it through this stage, and with a goddess-like image, I will be enough. I can do this, I have what it takes.”

At the beginning of the second year, Tina identifies the tiny figure in the bottom section of the collage shown in Figure 2 as a person scaling a rock cliff. “[M]y learning curve, I guess. But the person looks very strong, like she chooses to be doing it and she can do it. That is a good reminder for me—I have chosen this cliff.” When questioned as to the importance of the cottage, flowers, and dessert,



Figure 1

*Tina in first session: The fear of needing so much*



Figure 2

*Tina, beginning of second year: The end is in sight*



Tina shares that that is the future: “serenity, mountains, and balance.” Group members were curious about the slogans depicted on the collage and encouraged further clarification of their meanings.

The words “where the truth lies”—it is really about connecting with people. The truth is in myself and in the client. No slowing down though ... the end is in sight but it is just the beginning of another journey. Balance ... not getting caught up ... working out the knots. I don't want to be doing fast food counselling but fine dining counselling instead. It is not about doing it quickly but quality. This field I am in opens so many other doors—a gateway to adventure. Seeing the quieter part of myself. I am not the rescuer. I have developed shifting perspectives on a client. I am more at ease.

Tina was surprised by the difference in the final collage (Figure 3) at the conclusion of her second practicum. This collage was less about being a counsellor—other parts of her life were beginning to emerge. “I am not so focused on the goal of being a counsellor anymore for sure.” When we ask her to tell us about the angry young man, she states,

I didn't think I was angry but that guy with his mouth open but maybe I am. I don't want to become an activist. People say you need to be an activist for your clients but that homeless guy. Those are my clients. Being an activist might just be way too much for me. The word tough came up a lot.

Figure 3

*Tina, end of second year: Less dark but still a struggle*



Tina was discovering the day-to-day challenges of working as a counsellor were requiring more of her than she had anticipated and questioned which particular client group would be a good fit for her. She identified herself as the woman in the collage.

She is sort of sad but just calm sitting in the garden. I'm aware of environments that bring serenity more than I was. It is now about balancing counselling and other things. It is a lot less dark but still a struggle but then way more possibilities too.

#### DEBRIEFING THE COLLAGES

Self-reflection is the process of examining the impact of personal values, beliefs, and experiences to develop a deeper understanding of one's personal and professional biases, experiences, and beliefs as these may influence future action and learning. By viewing each collage as a moment in time in Tina's experience as a developing counsellor, group members and the second author were able to pinpoint areas of concern (e.g., normalizing the perceived need for having "all" the skills and knowledge before seeing clients; brainstorming ways to strengthen her support systems). The collages also served as jumping-off points for important group discussions around developing their sense of competency, their quest for answers, discovering their strengths, finding personal and professional balance, and moving into the realities of the counselling profession.

#### *Developing a Sense of Competency*

The collage activity generated a rich variety of reflection from the students. In the following sections, selected quotes provide a glimpse into the insights that emerged from a debriefing of the activity. In their first collages, supervisees expressed their concern about harming their clients. "There is the fear I have but I know I need to push past that and engage, but at the same time I don't want to screw up and hurt anyone because of my incompetence." One supervisee surrounded her fear of not having enough time to do the personal work that "really matters in becoming a counsellor." She surrounded this fear with her need to focus on healthy eating and relaxation.

During the second session, the supervisees were able to look back and see how they had moved from self-doubt to feeling more secure in their abilities to provide service to clients.

I am clear on feeling more confident but there is still this part of me that feels like I might want to throw up every time I get ready to see a client and feels great relief when they are no-shows. I'm more in touch with both the confident and scared part of myself now and know that the confidence is more and the fear is less than it used to be. Still the two of them, though.

One supervisee noted the number of words on her collage using the phrase "where the truth lies" to understand the importance she now places on the connection with "my truth and with the client."



As they processed their collages at the end of the second practicum, the three supervisees could see in their collages how their confidence had grown through the quality of the supervision received. For one supervisee, the face of a strong relaxed woman represented how she was less anxious and how she had gained confidence from the acknowledgment she received for her own initiative at her practicum site.

### *The Quest for Answers*

All the supervisees portrayed in various ways their need for certainty and answers. One group member represented her reaction to the ambiguity of the counselling process as “a machine gone wild with all the gears and cogs which are supposed to work in a certain way but for some reason they won’t work for me.” Another member displayed a shark in the middle of her collage. When debriefing, the student spoke about being “constantly on your learning edge so you never feel comfortable. It almost seems designed to make you crazy.”

The message that “there is no such thing as doing it perfectly, no such thing as a perfect session or counsellor” is represented by a cliff in one of the final collages. “I don’t see every client as that cliff for me anymore. I’m not in danger of falling, I can do the work.” Another group member noted, “I am having the realization that there will never be a right way to do this.”

### *Discovering Their Strengths*

The collages were useful to group members in rediscovering their strengths. Their sense of themselves as counsellors across the three sessions showed how they moved “from a little grasshopper who knew nothing to a pseudo-employee in ‘real’ counselling work.” Over time a foundation was built, while “on top I am still small, a seedling really, but my roots are strongly planted now. I know I won’t get pulled out when it gets windy.” Through their applied work at practicum sites, they became aware of their inner strength and resilience. “Many people with way more experience just were not good on the fly and in the moment. So I was able to see the context for my own strength.”

### *Balancing the Personal and the Professional World*

In their final collages, all supervisees found ways to portray that they had come full circle. “I feel like I’ve moved through the part of development of me as a counsellor ... it is about more than that now ... not to say I won’t keep developing for sure.” Another placed the word “HEALTH” in the centre of her collage, noting that, “It isn’t so much now about being a counsellor—it is more about balancing being a counsellor with the rest of my life.”

### *Moving into the Realities of the Counselling Profession*

Phrases like “integrate this” and “building community” as well as a picture of a treadmill were used by group members to discuss the challenges of working in the field. Advocacy for clients, working with a wide range of mental and concurrent disorders, and resourcing clients were identified as the major shifts as they took on



professional positions. "What I am hearing is so graphic I am getting traumatized by them. And that has to change and I know that. I know I won't stay in substance abuse for more than two years." The collage activities were viewed as vehicles for expressing and discussing their fears and anxieties as they entered the professional world. "The art work allowed me to be transparent with myself and with my peers."

#### THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING MAGAZINE PICTURE COLLAGE IN GROUP SUPERVISION

Creative approaches to group supervision, including collage work, increase opportunities for personal awareness and reflection but require careful planning. Group cohesion is necessary in order for supervisees to experience a sense of belonging, acceptance, and safety. Forming smaller self-selected groups from the larger cohort was one way we fostered cohesion. Group members already had a high level of comfort with each other. As supervisors, we increased cohesion by asking supervisees to share their experiences with each other, and we ensured modelling of good listening and reflecting skills. As group members gained comfort with the process of sharing their perspectives of their work, they began to challenge each other to explore their emotional reactions.

Finding time to commit to this process was certainly a challenge. However, the first author was able to draw on the resources provided by doctoral students who were eager to act as supervisors to a small group of students. In this manner, all students could be provided with group supervision in addition to other types of supervision experiences typically offered in the program (e.g., one-on-one, dyads, peer, and whole class supervision).

Keeping a clear boundary between personal concerns and professional development was another area of unease. Through the collage work, supervisees disclosed personal aspects of their life that supervisors may not have been privy to in more traditional supervision approaches. Art-based approaches in supervision can be very powerful and disclosing. Therefore, maintaining boundaries that keep the supervisor-supervisee relationship from shifting to one of therapist-client is essential. By taking advantage of potential boundary crossings as teachable moments, supervisors can model appropriate boundary setting and the importance of following codes of ethics.

In the future, we would provide a range of expressive art activities to supervisees in group supervision to increase "self-awareness by having them express themselves in a symbolic manner" (Gladding, 2005, p. 10). Additionally, a journaling activity following the expressive art activity would assist supervisees in integrating new perspectives and self-knowledge.

#### CONCLUSION

The use of expressive arts in supervision can act as a catalyst in accessing alternate forms of knowledge and in retrieving beliefs, feelings, and experiences outside

of one's immediate awareness. Creative methods can allow for the deconstruction of a problem story and the construction of a story more resonant with students' values to take its place (Crocket, 2004). This is especially meaningful for counsellors in training because the stories that developing counsellors tell themselves influence how they develop their own personal theory of counselling (Wong-Wylie, 2006). Expressive-arts-based approaches can help navigate the unknown and find meaning by building a bridge between past and present and between one's own story and the journey that story represents as the supervisee and supervisor engage in interactive meaning making. Collage work can provide an alternate medium in supervision to develop reflective analysis and self-exploration.

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