Beyond Active Listening: Creativity, the Arts, and Positive Mental Health

Samuel T. Gladding
Hubert McNeil Poteat Lecture
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B. F. Skinner Phenomenon

After graduating from Hamilton College, Skinner, who was determined to be a writer, took up residency in New York’s Greenwich Village. After a year of writing, he found out he had nothing to say!

Overview of the Presentation

1. Influences behind the ideas – Hammarskjold, Allport, and experience as a mental health counselor
2. Definition of Terms:
   - Active Listening
   - Creativity
   - the Arts
   - Positive Mental Health
3. Creativity in Positive Mental Health
4. Advantages of the Arts in Promoting Positive Mental Health
5. Conclusion
1. Influences Behind the Focus of the Lecture

Dag Hammarskjöld

Hammarskjöld was a Swedish diplomat, economist, and author. The second Secretary-General of the United Nations, he served from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961.

Markings

Markings consists of short diary-like notes, prose and haiku poems.

“The more faithfully you listen to the voices within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside.”
Gordon Allport

Personality Theorist who conceptualized individuals as:
“Always becoming….”

Daniel Pink and “Always Becoming”

Daniel Pink: “We’ve progressed from a society of farmers (AGRICULTURAL AGE) to a society of factory workers (INDUSTRIAL AGE) to a society of knowledge workers (INFORMATION AGE). And now we’re progressing yet again – to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers (CONCEPTUAL AGE).”

Experience at the Rockingham County Mental Health Center

Rockingham County has contributed more governors to the State of North Carolina than any other county (as well as WFU’s own Ed Wilson). In Rockingham, I became acutely aware of the voices within me, the voices of others, the arts, creative processes in positive mental health, and the importance of each.
The Voices Within: Reflections
I feel at times that I’m wasting my mind
as we wade through your thoughts and emotions.
With my skills I could be in a world-renowned clinic
with a plush, private office, soft padded chairs,
and a sharp secretary at my command.
Instead of here in a pink cinderblock room
where it leaks when it rains
and the noise seeps under the door like water.
But in leaving, you pause for a moment
as your voice spills out in a whisper:
“Thanks for being here when I hurt.”
With those words my fantasies end, as reality,
like a wellspring
begin filling me
with life-giving knowledge,
as it cascades through my mind,
That in meeting you,
when you’re flooded with pain,
I discover myself.


The Voices of Others/Self: Surrendering of Socks

Importance of Arts in Mental Health
People would bring me poems, paintings and music at the Rockingham County Mental Health Center. At this time the work of the Metaphor Research Group headed by Howard Pollio came to my attention. Two of their basic findings were that when people were becoming mentally healthier:
1. They used more metaphors
2. They used more humor (self-reflective or self-effacing humor)

2. Key Terms in Presentation

Key Term: Active Listening
Active listening is a process that constructs meaning from both verbal and nonverbal messages. It describes the underlying emotion ("You seem to feel angry, sad, happy"). It adds action to a normally passive process. It is important because it helps people realize they are heard and understood.
Active Listening

Key Term: Creativity

Creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original or unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful or meets task constraints). It is of high quality and fits within the expectations of society.


Dynamics of Creativity

Creativity is a lot like kissing in that it is so “intrinsically interesting and satisfying that few bother to critically examine it.”

Carl Thoresen
Creativity: New & Useful

Fosbury Flop:
Going over the bar backwards
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld4W6VA0uLc

Key Term: The Arts
Music; Theater/Drama; Prose/Poetry; Dance/Movement; Visual; Humor; Film/Photography
Key Term: Positive Mental Health

Positive mental health is a state of well-being in which we realize our abilities, can cope with life’s normal stresses, and can work regularly and productively. Good mental health is the foundation for a person’s effective functioning.

Source: Dr. Darlene Powell Garlington “What is Positive Mental Health and How Do You Maintain it?” http://www.militarymentalhealth.org/blog/2013/01/maintain-overall-positive-mental-health/

3. Creativity in Positive Mental Health

The impact of creativity on positive mental health has been studied extensively by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. It is written about extensively by Martin Seligman, who coined the term “learned helplessness,” as well as “positive psychology”.


What Creativity Does

People are more stuck than they are sick. They are using the strategies that don’t work again and again.

Creativity can help people get unstuck (do something new and useful) without becoming unglued and lead to positive mental health.
**An Example of Stuckness**

She was lonely so she cut herself to get her friends’ attention,
He was scared so he hit someone and now he has detention,
Neither one knew what to do so they did their best,
The trouble is now they wear labels: “Different from the rest!”

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**Research on Creativity Has Found**

- Creative people share many of the same characteristics as psychologically healthy people.
- Creativity can be taught and therefore people can become innovative and rejuvenated as a result.
- Creativity means looks at a situation from many angles and generating more choices.

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**Creative Thought**

Affected by the ways in which we classify things

For example: an apple and the moon

(could see them as round or could see them as objects subject to gravity)
The Importance of Creativity

“The results of creativity enrich the culture and so they indirectly improve the quality of our lives.”

“In addition, to have a good life, it is not enough to remove what is wrong from it. We also need a positive goal... creativity provides one of the most exciting models for living.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

The Importance of Creativity

“Most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the results of creativity.”

“Creativity leaves an outcome that adds to the richness and complexity of the future.” Only sex, sports, music, and religious ecstasy provide as profound a sense of being part of an entity greater than ourselves and those experiences are fleeting and leave no trace.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
The Importance of Creativity: Careers of Seven Prominent 20th Century People with Rogers Surname

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl Rogers</td>
<td>a theoretical practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Rogers</td>
<td>a creative arts therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Rogers</td>
<td>a humorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger Rogers</td>
<td>a dancer &amp; actress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Rogers</td>
<td>a cowboy role model &amp; actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Rogers</td>
<td>an educator &amp; musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenny Rogers</td>
<td>a singer/actor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As important as the therapeutic Rogers were it could be argued that the contributions of the entertainment Rogers were greater:

1. all were role models
2. all perfected their talents – worked hard
3. all were public figures – made films, went on stage, offered perspectives on life
4. all made unique contributions to their profession
5. all had failures, disappointments, tragedy, and success and usually handled them well – very human

Contributions of the 20th Century Rogers

6. all contributed to the public good (from dancing to humor)
7. all were positive in what they expected of themselves
8. all were interested in others and the development of character
9. all entertained, inspired, and helped people forget their troubles -- at least temporarily
10. all became positively significant in the lives of millions.

Misunderstanding of Creativity

Jeffrey Kottler's research points out that in contrast to what myths would have us believe, most people who are creative and artistic use the arts to keep them healthier than they would be otherwise. He examined the lives of Marilyn Monroe, Sylvia Plath, Ernest Hemingway, Brian Wilson, Judy Garland, Lenny Bruce, Charles Mingus, among others. He found a creative mindset actually helps people deal with reality of life.


William Styron – Darkness Visible

Styron relates how in the depths of depression when he had suicidal ideations, he heard music. “I was immersed in music from the beginning and I never lost the sense that music is the ultimate inspiration—the wellspring for my creativity…. for me music has an eclectic appeal—classical, country, jazz, the swing music of the forties, some of the rousing Protestant hymns. At their best all of these modes can transport me…. The relationship between music and writing is emotion…. I don’t think that I would have been able to write a single word had it not been for music as a force in my life.”


How is Creativity Fostered?

By changing conditions in the environment or moving to an unfamiliar environment we become more creative. It is the opposite of trying to make people think more creatively. Florence, Italy (1400s); Elizabethan England (1600s); Silicon Valley (1980s).

Creativity, Courage, Certainties

"Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties."

Erich Fromm

Development Means Taking Risk/Making Changes

In the cool grey dawn of early September,

I place the final suitcase into my Mustang

And silently say "good-bye"

to the quiet beauty of North Carolina.

Hesitantly, I head for the blue ocean-lined coast of Connecticut.

bound for a new position and the unknown.

Traveling with me are a sheep named "Eli"

and the still fresh memories of our last counseling session.

You, who wrestled so long with fears

that I kindlingly started calling you "Jacob"

are as much a part of me as my luggage.

Moving in life is bittersweet

like giving up friends and fears.

The taste is like early fall persimmons,

decievously delicious but tart.

A Formula for Creativity
Gene Cohen believes creativity can be formulated as follows

\[ C = m^2 \]

Where
- \( C \) equals creativity
- \( m \) equals mass of what you know multiplied by \( e \) which equals life experience in two dimensions
  - inner life or emotional experience
  - outer, or external, life experience

Importance of Emotion in Cohen’s Formula

*Since Feeling Is First*
by e.e. cummings

“since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you...”

To Maximize Creativity

- Get rid of disincentives such as fear
- Provide time for meditation and aloneness (i.e., akin to sensory deprivation)
- Be quick to recognize and use good ideas and to recognize errors
- Expect creativity
To Maximize Creativity

- Create a climate for discussion; optimize interpersonal interaction
- Reward creative thought
- Set up the right environment, i.e., permission and freedom of expression
- Challenge conformity and the status quo

4. The Arts and Positive Mental Health

Engagement of the Arts and People

Sometimes the arts enrich us as we experience them. That is healthy and healing in itself. Visit Reynolda House.

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'

John Keats (1795-1821), *Ode on a Grecian Urn*
History of the Arts in Positive Mental Health

500 B.C.E. Egyptians encouraged mentally disturbed to pursue artistic interests and attend concerts.

Ancient Greeks employed drama and music to help the disturbed achieve catharsis, relieve themselves of pent up emotions, and achieve balance.

Hebrews in time of Saul/David/Solomon – music was seen as therapeutic

Elizabethan England encouraged attendance at plays for catharsis
History of the Arts in Positive Mental Health

English Poets of Meditation: Poets like Donne, Southwell, Herbert in the 17th & 18th Centuries
Moral Therapy - Philippe Pinel
York Retreat – William Tuke

Advantages of the Arts in Promoting Positive Mental Health

- Playfulness
- Promotes a collegial relationship
- Promotes communication
- Enable people to recognize the multiple nature of themselves and the world
- Perceived objectivity
- Encourage non-verbal people to participate meaningfully in counseling relationships

Qualities of the Arts

- Process orientated
- Geared to elicit emotional responses
- Highlight aspects of sensual reality
- Focus on helping clients establish inner control
- Lead to a greater awareness of identity
- Make the covert overt
Arts are often Combined
Frank & Ernest as well as William Styron

Arts Connected with Positive Mental Health

- a. Drawing
- b. Bibliotherapy/Scriptotherapy
- c. Music
- d. Drama
- e. Humor
- f. Movement/Dance
- g. Resources for using the arts in promoting positive mental health

a. Drawing

Saul Steinberg (1914-1999) best known for his work in the New Yorker, once said that:

“Drawing is a Way of Reasoning on Paper.”
M. C. Escher

Self Portrait
(oppeness of mind is a key factor in creativity. It is a discovery process)

Grandma Moses
Anna Mary Robertson Moses
She started her art career late and drew from depression – to combat it.

Art: The Mental Illness Monsters
by Toby Allen
The artwork of mental illness monsters is not at all intended to make light of these conditions but instead is intended to give these intangible mental disorders some substance and make them appear more beatable as physical entities. Toby Allen hopes the drawings will help to reduce the stigma around mental disorders and that they will help bring an element of humor and understanding to the conditions.
Depression
Toby Allen's Depression monster is designed as one that floats around endlessly with its eyes covered to hide itself from the world.

Anxiety
Toby Allen says he designed the monster to be small enough to sit on the victim's shoulder and whisper things in their ear. He explained that he made the monster a dark color to reflect the oppressive feeling he associates with anxiety. His Social Anxiety monster has pale anemic-looking skin because it spends most of its life underground.

Draw It All Better
Instead of having a client tell you about how he or she feels, have them draw representative lines at the beginning or conclusion of a counseling session. Sometimes both. Then discuss the feelings if the client is so inclined.
Lines of Feeling

Rosebush

Photography

- Passive photography*
- Active photography*

b. Bibliotherapy/Scriptotherapy
- Read a book with strong role models
- Line Savers
- Scriptotherapy (Writing)
  - Writing about Stress
  - Six Word Stories

Books with a Strong Role Model
- The Book Thief
- Sara’s Key
- Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
- The Chronicles of Narnia
- Night
- Little Women
- The Odyssey
- The Color Purple
- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Writing: Line Savers
Make the Covert Overt
- Things will be okay if you hold on for one more day – hold on (Wilson Phillips)
- “We’re fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance” – Japanese proverb
- “Try to be the kind of person your dog thinks you are.”
- “Poetry gives you permission to feel,” James Autry
The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances; if there is any reaction, both are transformed.  

Carl Jung

“So the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads.”  

Dr. Seuss

With the gift of listening comes the gift of healing.  

Catherine de Hueck Doherty

Writing about Stress -- Scriptotherapy

According to research by James Pennebaker, writing about your stress can shift your focus and relieve your stress while improving all aspects of your life: physical, mental, behavioral, social.

Write What You Know
The Power of Writing

“I can shake off everything if I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.”

Anne Frank

Importance of Writing for Mental Health

PostSecret is an ongoing community art project where people mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a homemade postcard.

PostSecret, 13345 Copper Ridge Road, Germantown, MD 20874, USA

Six Word Stories

http://www.sixwordstories.net/about

This is a collection of short short stories consisting of just six words. It was inspired by Ernest Hemingway’s famous challenge.

Six Word Stories will include stories by famous people, reader submissions, myself, and the Internet at large.

Torched the haystack. Found the needle.

Goodbye, mission control. Thanks for trying.

I'm beside myself; cloning machine works
Writing and the Arts in Counseling

“If traditional career counseling tools offer a flashlight in the woods, writing and art may help light up the forest.”  -- Kendall Dudley

“Writing and art enrich our inner landscapes and allow for new identities, ideas and possibilities to emerge.”


c. Music and Positive Mental Health

Musical Chills & Music with Illness
Music & Sleep
Music & the 4 Basic Feelings
12 Step Songs
Music & Aging

Researchers at McGill University showed that listening to pleasurable music of any description induced 'musical chills,' which triggered the release of the feel-good chemical dopamine.


Music can actually have a significant positive impact on patients with long-term illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer and respiratory conditions. Numerous trials have shown that music can help lower heart rate, blood pressure and help relieve pain, anxiety and improve patient quality of life. It helps give patients control over their lives.
**Music and Sleep**

Harmat, Takács, & Bódízs (2008) found listening to classical music (as opposed to an audio book or doing nothing) for 45 minutes before bedtime improved sleep quality and lowered depression in college students.


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**Music of Feelings**

Sound out: mad, glad, sad, and surprise

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**12 step songs**

Click on [www.12StepSongs.Com](http://www.12StepSongs.Com) and hear the new CD "Songs Of The Twelve Steps". Feel free to download as many copies of the CD that would be of benefit to you and those around you.
Music and Aging

Music and the Aging Brain – Gene Cohen

Studies show that adding creativity and challenging your brain could actually add years to your life. There is evidence that intensive involvement in the arts helped to improve the mental health, physical health, and overall quality of life for the participants.

Music and Positive Mental Health

Music is universal. People listen to music:
- to regulate arousal and mood,
- to achieve self-awareness,
- and as an expression of social relatedness.


Music can be Enjoyed and Expressed Creatively by:

- Listening /Meditating/Relaxing
- Moving to music /Creative Dancing
- Composing/ Improvising
- Learning a song or a new instrument
d. Drama

- Dramatic introductions/Advertise Yourself
- Masks
- Dramatic Stories (Comicspedia)
- Improvisation or “Acting as if”
- Movies and Discussions
- Poem into a Drama
- Operas

Creativity and Drama

Jacob Moreno -- Psychodrama

The Living Newspaper

Drama
Comicspedia, an online database filled with hundreds of individual comic book summaries and their respective psychological focuses, has become of some interest to counselors in recent years.

Improvisation

Acting “as if.” In this procedure, individuals discuss how they would like to behave. Then they are simply instructed to act as if they were the persons they wish to be. The technique is one that is usually met with protests because people think they are being phony, but stress is lowered when individuals involved know they are simply acting and that their new behaviors in effect are no different from trying on new clothes to see how well they fit and feel.

A variation of improvisation is “Meanwhile Back at Elsinore Castle” where a person with two other individuals, one on either side (a pro & a con), debates a course of action.


Movies and Discussions: Marriage

A study by Ronald Rogge at the University of Rochester, found that watching a film that examined the complexities of marriage and discussing the issues together as a couple can be just as effective at curbing divorce rates as traditional marriage counseling methods.

The findings, published in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, show that the movie method helped cut the divorce rate of newlywed couples from 24 per cent to 11 per cent at the three-year mark — the same success rate as supervised sessions conducted by trained therapists.

Questions for Couples to Discuss after viewing the movies:

Did the couple have a strong friendship with each other? Were they able to support each other through bad moods, stressful days, and hard times? Did they listen to each other like good friends? Did the couple in the movie do considerate or affectionate things for each other?

In what way was this relationship similar to or different from your own relationship in this area? Did the partners seem to have similar expectations of their relationship? Where did their expectations differ? Did it seem like they were aware of their own expectations? Were their expectations reasonable? Did they share their expectations with each other?


Some Suggested Movies

- Anna Karenina
- As Good As It Gets
- Barefoot in the Park
- Children of a Lesser God
- Days of Wine and Roses
- Doing Young
- Fools Rush In
- Forget Paris
- Funny Girl
- Gone with the Wind
- Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner
- Husband and Wives
- Indecent Proposal
- Love Story
- Made for Each Other
- My Favourite Wife
- Nine Months
- On Golden Pond
- The Egg and I
- Steel Magnolias
- The Thin Man
- The Way We Were
- Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
Make a Poem a Drama

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

By Portia Nelson

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Autobiography in 5 Short Chapters

Chapter 1
There is a hole in the sidewalk,
I walk around it.
I take delight in finding a way out.
I walk through the same street. 
I am not a cop.
I can't help it.
I tried.
I have a foot in one part of society.
I am not a cop.
I am walking to an empty place.
We all take delight in finding a way out.

Chapter 3
I walk through the same street. 
There is a hole in the sidewalk.
I am not a cop. 
I am walking to an empty place.
It is easy to find a hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 4
I walk through the same street. 
There is a hole in the sidewalk.
I am not a cop.
I am not a cop.
I am walking to an empty place.

Chapter 5
I walk through another corner.

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e. Humor and Health

Advantages:
Negative correlation with sleeplessness, worry, and violence
Empowers; Promotes Internal Control
Helps in the psychological and physical healing process (Norm Cousins)
A coping mechanism

Humor and Mental Health

The Marx Brothers (minus Karl)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5I52aWTJo

Physical Effects of Laughter

William Fry study
1. Cardiovascular system – heart rate and blood pressure rise and fall
2. Heavy breathing – workout for respiratory
3. Endorphins may be released into blood stream creating a “runner’s high.”


Smiling and Feeling

In an experiment, individuals who held a pencil in their teeth and thus were able to smile rated cartoons as funnier than did those who held the pencil in their lips and thus could not smile.

“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.”

-- Thich Nhat Hanh
Ways of Forcing a Smile

- jump on the bed
- make faces at yourself in the mirror
- bake cookies
- dance
- find a playground and swing on the swing set
- find your baby pictures
- hug someone you love
- take a walk in the rain or the sunshine
- watch cartoons you loved as a kid
- imitate a well-known comedian - with exaggeration
- visit a pet store

Humor around the House … and on Holidays

Humor Reveals Truth

Loopy: another thing that penguins aren't very good at.
f. Movement/Dance and Positive Health

- memory
- alertness
- reality orientation
- personal insight
- acceptance
- self-esteem
- physical well-being,
- socialization,
- sense of accomplishment

Lack of Movement

Walking

The way you walk influences your self concept and mental health.
Inmates from Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC), a maximum security prison in the Philippines dancing to “They Don’t Care About Us.” The warden makes them do it. But if they are any good, they win places up front. It’s an incredible outlet of discipline and creativity to challenge the people the world might feel inclined to give up on entirely.

Movement to Music
Dance Helps Parkinson’s Patients Harness Therapeutic Power of Movement

Resources: National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Association

The creative arts therapies under NCCATA include art therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, music therapy, poetry therapy, and psychodrama.
Creativity and the Arts in Positive Mental Health: Closing Thoughts

Creativity and the arts can make the covert overt. They can bring out hidden or unexplored areas in people’s lives and help individuals become more whole, positive, and healthy. Creativity and the arts are empowering and help make choice and change fun or less threatening. They are like the letters in this cartoon.

Closing Thoughts

When I was unfocused in my youth, my father would call me aside and say: “Sam, you can’t be a promising young man forever.” He would follow this admonition by saying: “Give yourself to something great. Give yourself to something more than you are.” He never said what that should be.

I would say to you there is something inherently greater than ourselves in our striving for incorporating creativity, the arts, and positive mental health in our lives and in the lives of others. “Give yourself to something great.”
“Life only demands from you the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible - not to have run away.” Dag Hammarskjold