

Using Creativity and the Creative Arts in Counseling: An International Approach

Yaraticılıđı ve Yaraticı Sanatları Psikolojik Danıřmada Kullanma: Bir Uluslararası Yaklařım

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Abstract: Creativity and the creative arts are an integral part of counseling worldwide. This article examines the nature of creativity, especially little c creativity, and how it can be used in counseling by counselors and clients. Advantages of fostering creativity and using creativity in counseling are highlighted along with research in this domain, steps in the creative process, and phases people go through in becoming creative. The SCAMPER model is featured as a way of helping counselors assist clients and themselves in becoming more creative.

Key Words: creativity, little v creativity, counseling, creative arts, SCAMPER, international

Öz: Yaraticılık ve yaratıcı sanatlar, dünya çapında psikolojik danıřmanın ayrılmaz bir parçasıdır. Bu makale, yaraticılıđın doğası, özellikle daha gündelik anlamda karşılaşılabilen ufak tefek yaraticılık anlamındaki küçük c yaraticılıđın, psikolojik danıřmalarda psikolojik danıřmanlar ve danıřanlar tarafından nasıl kullanılabileceđi üzerinde durmaktadır. Psikolojik danıřmada yaraticılıđı desteklemenin ve yaraticılıđı kullanmanın avantajları, yaratıcı sürecin adımları, yaratıcı olmaya giden aşamalar, arařtırmalar ışığında vurgulanmıřtır. Bunun yanısıra psikolojik danıřmanların, danıřanların ve kendilerinin daha yaratıcı olmalarına yardımcı olmaları amacıyla geliştirilmiř olan SCAMPER modeli tanıtılmıřtır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: yaraticılık, küçük v yaraticılık, psikolojik danıřma, yaratıcı sanatlar, SCAMPER, uluslararası

She went about kissing frogs
for in her once-upon-a-time mind
that's what she had learned to do.
With each kiss came expectations
of slimy green changing to sparkling white.
With each day came the realizations
that quick-tongued, croaking, fly-eating creatures
Do not magically turn to instant princes
from the after effects of a fast-smooching,
smooth-talking, helping beauty.
So with regret she came back from a lively lily-
pond
to the sobering stacks of the village library
To page through the well-worn stories again
and confirm in print what she now knew in fact
that even loved frogs sometimes stay frogs
no matter how pretty the damsel or how high
the hope.

(Gladding, 1975)

Like the young lady in the poem who went about kissing frogs, many people in our global society are more stuck in nonproductive ideas or patterns than they are "sick" with a mental disorder. Unless they learn to break out of self-defeating patterns, they will probably not enjoy life or be as productive as they might be otherwise. We, as counselors, have the means through using creativity and the creative arts to assist such individuals so that they get better instead of bitter. The problem is that many counselors do not understand what creativity is or how they can use creativity and the creative arts in counseling (Gladding, 2011). For these professionals, creativity is like the weather. They talk about it, some study it, a few predict it, but they feel helpless to do anything about it. Yet counseling is a discipline that incorporates creativity and often the creative arts. The creative nature of counseling is not confined to the boundaries of a country. Indeed it is international.

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The secret to opening up to this approach is defining what creativity and the creative arts are. It is also studying how creative factors have been used and can be used in counseling.

What is creativity?

The definition of creativity depends on who you ask! There are over 200 definitions. However, there are two common elements that underlie the process. In its most basic form 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) (Sawyer, 2006). When creativity does not occur, especially in counseling, people usually do not progress and indeed may fall into painful patterns. For instance, I once worked with a woman in counseling who came to see me because she was frustrated in her attempt to marry a surgeon (Gladding, 2010). She had picked out an eligible physician and then cooked up a strategy. Her idea was to make personal contact, so she started going to the surgeon with symptoms. The symptoms turned into surgeries and by the time I saw her she had had her gall bladder and tonsils removed.

"How's it working?" I queried.

"Not too well" she replied. "He seems to be more interested in my internal organs than my outside personality."

"So, do you have anything else to give?" I asked.

"No. It's too painful" was all she could say. "I give up."

While this woman's strategy was not creative or productive, her decision to end her quest was wise like the woman in the poem at the beginning of this article who quit kissing frogs. Stopping nonproductive behaviors is usually a first step in becoming more creative. In contrast to the two examples of individuals just cited who were not initially creative is the story of a truck driver, who was not one of my clients, but who showed creativity. The driver was going up a mountain road and those behind him could not fail to notice that every few kilometers he would get out of his truck and bang on the sides of the trailer behind the cab. When asked why he was behaving in this unusual manner, the man replied:

"This truck will carry up to 2,000 pounds. I have 4,000 pounds of canaries in here. I have to keep half of them in the air at all times."

In essence the truck driver showed creativity by doing something novel and appropriate for his situation. Of course, purchasing a trailer that would haul 4,000 pounds would have been a better solution yet.

Two Types of Creativity

But there is more to creativity than just the new and practical! There is "Big C" and "little c" creativity (Sawyer, 2006). They have distinguishing features and affect the way many people, including counselors, view creativity and their part in it. Creativity with a "Big C" refers to creative acts that are recognized by a person's community and culture. These are extraordinary accomplishments of unusual people -- such as Albert Einstein's theory of relativity or Madame Curie's discovery of radium. While some "Big C" accomplishments are more local public acts by ordinary people, such as solving a community problem or beautifying a public space with a mural, most people do not express "Big C" creativity in this way.

Creativity with a "little c" is different and much more common. It is grounded in the ways people develop their individual potential and personal interests. It involves the using of imagination and inventiveness to solve a problem, create a product, or approach a challenge from a new perspective. In other words, "little c" creativity is focused on doing such everyday things in a new and appropriate way such as inventing a recipe, growing plants and trees in a garden, taking a photograph, writing a poem, or figuring out a different and useful way to approach a situation or difficulty.

While some people display "Big C" creativity, almost all people, including our clients, have varied amount of "little c" creativity at their disposal. The important point is to recognize how much of the little creative "c" we and our clients have and then to employ it with when appropriate. Even a small amount of "little c" creativity is enough to make important changes. For instance, going to bed earlier may mean a person wakes up more rested and refreshed and is thus able to be less stressed and more inventive in approaching daily challenges.

However, before employing any type of creativity, we, as counselors, should be aware of what the research says about creativity in general and how it impacts people's lives.

Research on Creativity

There is not a lot of research on creativity. Less than one half of 1% of all research in counseling and psychology is conducted on creativity. Yet, the research on creativity (regardless of the status of the letter "c") has found:

- Creative people share many of the same characteristics as psychologically healthy people, i.e., they are people to emulate or be with.

- Creativity can be taught (or at least encouraged).
- Creativity is heterogeneous. It does not follow a set pattern. The individual creative curve is quite varied. So creativity is not like a tube sock where one size fits all.
- There is a gradual decline in creativity over the years, but the degree of decline varies drastically with the field or discipline (Cohen, 2000). Interestingly, creativity in counseling does not decline rapidly.
- Creative potential can thrive in an environment which encourages it and is held back by other environments.

Highly creative people, including counselors, have the following characteristics. They

- are flexible and open to new ideas
- are tolerant in regard to ambiguity
- have a wide range of interests, curiosity, and energy
- possess vivid imaginations and a sense of playfulness
- are committed to work hard and concentrate on tasks,
- are comfortable with change,
- are hard working and persistent,
- are divergent in their thinking
- thoroughly understand their field or discipline
- are inspired to produce novel work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Besides the creativity found in people in general, professions such as counseling can be and actually contain artistic elements within them that promote creativity in persons as well.

Counseling as Creative

One characteristic of counseling that makes it creative is its focus on dealing with the originality of every person and his or her concerns. In doing so, counseling highlights the novel and the practical. To be specific counseling is creative in that it is:

- Playful – Counseling is lively and lighthearted at times (For instance, there are counseling jokes, such as: What did the math book say to the counseling book? “I’ve got problems.” And what did the counseling book say back: “I’m solution focused.”)
- Collegial – Counseling fosters a partnership of problem solving. Where two or more people examine the situation before them, ideas are generated and it is from ideas that solutions come.
- Communicative – Counseling operates on verbal and nonverbal levels. Therefore, behaviors as well as words may result in

someone doing something differently, such as smiling instead of just talking about being happy.

- Culturally sensitive and encompassing – Counseling is a unique approach that can be offered to people from all backgrounds. As such it is appropriate and life enhancing to all individuals who enter into the process.

Therefore, because of these four entities, counseling is creative and can help both counselors and clients understand themselves and their environments differently and in the process lead to new and better ways of living.

Five Phases of Creativity

There are five phases a person goes through in the creative process, whether in counseling or not (Sawyer, 2006). These five phases are important to understand because they help counselors and clients realize that creativity is usually not an instantaneous occurrence. At its best, creativity, especially in counseling, takes work.

The first stage in the creative process is preparation. Preparation is the acquiring of skills, background information, and resources. It is sensing and defining a problem. Therefore, if a client wants to become a better public speaker, he or she may need to work with someone to acquire more skills in this area. The movie, *The King’s Speech*, is an excellent example of preparation where King George VI of England prepared himself to speak in public by working with a speech therapist. In counseling, preparation may mean reading up on case histories similar to the one a client is presenting.

The second stage in the creative process is concentration. The act of concentration involves focusing intensely on a problem to the exclusion of other demands. It is a trial and error phase that includes false starts and frustration. For example, scientist Thomas Edison tested more than 1600 filaments before finding one that worked well for the light bulb he invented. In counseling, a parallel process might be that a counselor gives his or her undivided attention to a client who is describing himself or herself. The idea behind the behavior is for the counselor to pick up vital information from the client in order help him or her in the best way possible.

The middle step of the creative process is incubation. The act of incubation involves withdrawing from a problem while mentally sorting, integrating, and clarifying ideas at an unconscious level. Often incubation includes relaxation and solitude. During such times of calm work goes on that people are not aware of as the mind associates one idea with another.

The next to the last step in the creative process is illumination. Like fireworks, illumination is often sudden, involving the emergence of an image, idea, or perspective that suggests a solution or direction for further work. The most famous example of illumination in history involves the ancient *Greek* scholar Archimedes who became so excited when figuring out how to determine if a crown was made of real gold that he hopped out of his bath and literally ran naked down the street. Some individuals like to think of this stage as the “Aha Stage” for the surprise and elucidation that springs forth quickly. Indeed, sometimes it is.

The final stage of the creative process is made up of verification and elaboration. It involves testing out ideas, evaluating them further, developing a strategy for using them, implementing that strategy, and convincing others of the worth of the ideas so tested. For example, in counseling a counselor may verify that a behavioral approach helped her client. She may then give the client even more elaborate behavioral homework assignments.

As the stage process shows, creativity does not happen instantly. These stages in the process are not necessarily distinct and usually involve a complex recycling of the process. Moreover, to infuse or incorporate creativity into counseling, three other implementation behaviors must take place simultaneously.

The Three Step Process

Once there is insight and initial verification of the worth of an idea, more involved changes in a client’s life must take place. These entail a three step process of stopping self-defeating behavior, shifting focus, and starting new actions more systematically.

Step one is to stop self-defeating action that has dominated a person’s life in the past. To bring about positive change, clients must quit thinking, feeling, behaving in certain ways, for example, being irrational, obsessive, or overly cognitive. For example, by being irrational or overly emotional clients can re-depress or re-traumatize themselves. An illustration of the type of self-defeating behavior that should be stopped can be seen in a young man I once worked with who would drive by his former girlfriend’s house each time he had a counseling appointment. Since he had never resolved the emotions he had for the young woman, he ended up coming in depressed at the start of each session. The first step to helping him was to have him discontinue the self-defeating behavior that made him sad since there were numerous ways he could get to my office without going passed his former fiancé’s house.

In addition to not acting irrationally or overly emotional, clients must learn to stop acting impulsively, short-sighted, or foolishly, such as always saying “yes” when they mean “no”. Once there is stoppage of hurtful, harmful, or inappropriate behaviors a second stage in the creative process can take place -- shifting

The shifting stage is a sorting through or movement of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is looking for new ways to perceive the world and classify things differently. For instance, an apple and the moon can be seen as round or they can be seen as objects subject to gravity. Likewise, one’s spouse can be seen as one’s property but also as a person who belongs to the world, volunteers to be with you, and travels in multiple social circles. The latter view keeps one from spouse abuse or jealousy.

When my children were young they helped me shift my perception of dusk. Basically, when trying to get them to bed one night, my oldest said: “Dad, it is just white dark. We wait until blue dark to come in and we go to bed at black dark.” I have never seen nightfall the same way since. Shifting makes a difference.

My wife used a refrain to give me a different perception of our relationship too when our third child was born. Her words were: “The honeymoon is not over. There are just more people on it.”

Once clients begin shifting perceptions, they can transition into the last stage involved in becoming more creative. This is the start stage or simply beginning something new.

There are several ways the start stage can be implemented creatively. First, through visualizing and drawing clients can begin to become more concrete and make positive changes in how they perceive and live their lives. Images can change from pictures of being out of control and helpless to images of being able and capable even in severe situations. By employing the visual arts in counseling, an observable trail is created. “Draw it all better” is one such exercise where in an initial picture of a situation associated with a feeling, such as “bad,” “sad,” or “anxious” is drawn. That picture is followed by drawing “it,” the feeling, all better. In a third and final picture, a strategy for getting to the better from the first to the second picture is drawn. Such strategies may be confiding in friends, coaching, reading, or doing an activity like helping someone.

Another way of starting something new is through writing. According to research by James Pennebaker (1990) writing about stress can shift people’s focus and relieve them of their stress while improving

all other aspects of their lives – physical, mental, behavioral, social. The secret is to write 20 minutes a day, four days a week, for at least a month. As one of my clients once said when she began to write: “The words, the words, they must come out; I feel them inside just scurrying about.”

Yet a third creative way to start a new productive way of being is through reading/remembering. Using the words and thoughts of others such as cultural stories, autobiographies, novels, or inspirational quotes from respected sources, like scripture or important books, may also help a client begin to move in a more constructive and creative direction. One such way this is done is through a technique called “Line savers” where a favorite quote is remembered and recited regularly. For example: “One day at a time;” “Can’t never could; I can,” “I’m okay, you’re okay.”

SCAMPER: A Way to Be Creative

In initiating the process of becoming more creative as a counselor and helping our clients be more creative, it is helpful to remember the acronym SCAMPER as a way of promoting the process. SCAMPER was originated by Robert Eberle (1971) as a mnemonic device to foster creativity in children. However, this device can be used in individual, couple, group, and family counseling too. The SCAMPER model is atheoretical, can be used by counselors regardless of their theoretical persuasion. Each letter stands for an action that a counselor or client can take.

The S stands for Substitute, that is to have a person or thing act or serve in the place of another. Substituting may spark ideas or bring a new perspective to a person. An example of substituting can be the use of apple sauce for butter or one actor substituting for another. The question is “What can you put in place of what has been?” Examples abound such as saying “crunch” instead of using profanity. In counseling a client can learn to substitute the word “and” for “but,” e.g., “yes, and” instead of “yes, but” and thereby have more open and fulfilling conversations.

The C in SCAMPER is for the word Combine that is to bring together or unite. Combining promotes economy of effort and time. It may also lead to something different or better, for example, jazz or a symphony where there is a combination of sounds or athletic movements such as in soccer. A combination exercise in counseling is known as Adverbs where an adverb is defined as any word ending in “ly.” In this exercise clients combine elements an adverb, a movement, and a pencil. They pass the pencil back and forth using adverbs and an action that represents

the adverb for example. “slowly,” “quickly,” “gracefully,” “awkwardly,” or “joyfully.”

The A in SCAMPER is for adopt or adapt. To adopt is to make something your own, like a song, a pet, or a child. To adapt is to adjust for the purpose of suiting a condition or purpose such as the temperature in a room, clothing, or a car.

Adaptation is an important part of healing and helping in the creative process and can assist clients in becoming more productive. Thus adapting to a new environment, an altered work schedule, or a different way of responding to others can give clients more constructive ways of operating in the world. Clients can also adopt a poem, such as William Blake’s, “The Poison Tree,” as a way of reconciling friendships. The poem reads as follows:

I was angry with my foe
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
I was angry with my friend
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

After memorizing the poem, a client might approach someone he or she has had an argument or falling out with. The client would then ask permission to talk to the alienated friend and if granted would say: “These are not my words but words by the poet, William Blake, in a poem entitled “The Poison Tree.” The poem would then be recited after which the client would say: “I know we have had a falling out but I would like to talk to you about it so that we could be friends again. I want to be your friend not your foe.”

The M in SCAMPER stands for Modify. To modify is to alter, to change the form or quality of something. This can be done in one of two ways. The first is to magnify or to enlarge and make greater in form or quality. The second is to minify that is to make smaller, lighter, slower, or less frequent. For example, people, usually women, can magnify their height by wearing heels or increase their chances of being noticed by wearing bright colors. Creative individuals often minify a response such as going from being angry to being annoyed. They can also enlarge a feeling too, such as going from being tepid to being furious.

In counseling an exercise called “Sun/Cloud/Tree” can be used to show clients the power of modification. In this exercise, three elements, a sun, a cloud, and a tree are drawn initially. Then the same three elements are drawn again with one of them being modified, that is enlarged or shrunk. In comparing the two pictures a client can see that changing one element in a drawing changes the drawing itself and where one element is modified, the perception of the others change as well.

The P in SCAMPER is to put something to other

uses than the purpose it was originally intended for. Time, talent, and people's feelings can fall into this category. For example anger can be put to work in planting a garden or cleaning a house. An example of putting ourselves and skills to other uses occurred once in a counseling session I had with a woman who swore she would not change (Gladding, 2010). She had been to the best and the brightest of counselors, she stated, and none of them had been helpful. She was fixated on being miserable. However, I was determined, so we started a counseling relationship and, as she predicted I had zero success with her. For every move and suggestion I made, she had a countermove. I probed, confronted, reinforced, reframed, reflected, and empathized. Nothing happened. Finally, after several sessions and no progress, I realized the inevitable. She had "won."

Rather than be passive or aggressive about the matter, I became aware that I needed to do something to commemorate the event. Thus, as we were about to end another frustrating session, I reached down, untied my shoes, took off my socks, and handed them to her. I said: "You have won and as a symbol of your victory, you shall have my socks. They are the modern equivalent of a sword or a shield. I want you to take them and display them on the mantel over your fireplace like a trophy. Then you can tell others of your hard work and what it led to."

She was stunned. She did not want to take the socks but I was aware that somehow she must. So I persisted and insisted. She laughed. Then she did a strange and wonderful thing: she cried. When the tears stopped flowing, the words began to tumble out. She became more in tune with the feelings inside of her and acted on them. We extended that session and we scheduled more. She got better. She still has my socks as far as I know. They are somewhere in a glassed frame in her house as a symbol of her transformation. I think of them often and realize had I not put them to another use other than what they were intended for, change may not have occurred.

The E in SCAMPER is for eliminating that is to remove, omit, or get rid of a quality. The question in eliminating is: "What are you doing that you could give up and not miss? In life, eliminating can revolved around privileges, media such as television, or unhealthy foods or habits such as candy or shouting.

In counseling eliminating closed questions, ruminating thoughts thought through stopping, or remove labels on clients is often a helpful thing to do. A creative exercise known as "Lines of feeling" is a way of eliminating words while still being able to find out how a client is feeling. Counselors can do this activity at the beginning and at the end of a session.

In implementing this action simply have the client draw lines representing his or her feelings rather than having him or her tell about feelings. If the counselor has colored markers, a client will usually indicate more of what is on their mind and will begin to talk more.

The importance of eliminating came home to me one time in a somewhat bizarre way (Gladding, 2010). I had completed intake information on a man and asked him what he would like to work on in the session. He looked at me a bit negatively and simply stated: "I am not talking until you get rid of the rabbits in this room." We were in a rural area so I surveyed our surroundings. Not seeing any rabbits, I asked where they were. He pointed to an imaginary hare and I went over, grabbed it by its imaginary ears, then opened the door, and threw it outside. As I went to sit down he pointed to a second non-visible bunny, so I proceeded to do the same thing. Again, as I went back to my chair he pointed to a third invisible furry critter with long ears and a cotton tale so he said. As I approached this third imaginary rabbit and started to grab it by its airy ears, I suddenly stopped and thought, as I bent down: "Just who really needs help here?"

From the experience I came to realize and appreciate anew that if counseling is going to be beneficial, it must be based in reality. Sometimes that means eliminating behaviors such as tossing out hallucinations. I probably would have eventually learned that and how to do other necessary helping techniques in counseling but my client experience sped up the process. He helped me realize that it is both what we do and what we do not do that makes a difference in counseling.

The final letter R is for Reverse or Rearrange. To reverse is to turn around. To

rearrange is to change order of a plan, a layout or a scheme. Think of the ways flowers can be sorted. There is more than one way to arrange or rearrange them to make a bouquet. Letters are rearranged also to make words.

In counseling the rearranging chairs may get clients to view a situation from a different perspective as they see a room or others in a session from a new angle. Rearranging what is highlighted in a client's life can also take the form of accentuating some negative situations that ultimately had positive results or that taught the client something more about life. Thus sometimes it is important to reshuffle events in a client's life, just as one would rearrange words, if a client is going to make changes.

Reversing can take numerous forms too, such as who talks first. I learned the power of reversing when

my then-preschool first child, got his head stuck in the slats of a banister. My wife found him when he was pulling trying to get his head out from between the bars. She assisted him all she could by doing everything from greasing his head to encouraging him to pull, push, and tug. Nothing worked. Finally my wife asked our child how you got in such a situation. "Simple," the child said. "I did this" and then in reverse order, he showed his mother how he had gotten his head stuck as he proceeded to free himself.

Likewise our clients sometimes gain a new perspective on otherwise dismal situations in surprising ways when they reverse themselves. Being an effective counselor is giving oneself permission to sometimes encourage such action in self or others.

Conclusion

Creativity, the ability to foster something novel and useful, is an integral part of counseling. The process is not restricted by culture, climate, or client. Every counseling session is unique and requires counselors to meet it with practicality and newness. As counselors it is important to be loyal to proven theories, techniques, and methods based on research, while still being willing to tap into our creative side and play out hunches and intuitions. We can do this by recognizing that all individuals have "little c" creativity and if given the right tools they can succeed in changing their lives. As counselors we must realize

that creativity is a process involving multiple stages and different ways of acting: stopping, shifting, and starting. The use of our knowledge about creativity and the employment of mnemonic devices like SCAMPER are ways to maximize creative abilities in clinical setting.

Creativity must be used wisely, actively and productively if more clients are going to be helped than would otherwise be possible. When so done, creativity can help counselors and clients avoid non-productive behaviors such as metaphorically or literally kissing frogs or engaging in non-productive behaviors. Counselors and clients can then move on to constructive actions that promote mental health and well being.

In Turkey, the process of being creative in counseling is not radically different in theory from what it is internationally. However, because Turkey has a long and rich history of counseling unique to its own culture, the practices of being creative may take on distinctiveness. Such practices, especially exercises that center around little c creativity and the SCAMPER model, may look different from those in places like the United States or Great Britain. Nevertheless, the importance of fostering creativity in clients is not the appearance of what emerges but the fact that through the creative processes clients are freed to gain insights, implement choices and thus make changes.

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