

UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE
COUNSELING STUDENTS ENGAGED IN THERAPEUTIC EXPRESSIVE
ARTS-BASED ACTIVITIES

A Dissertation
by
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Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2012
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE COUNSELING STUDENTS ENGAGED IN THERAPEUTIC EXPRESSIVE ARTS- BASED ACTIVITIES (December 2012)

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This study focuses on how graduate counseling students experience therapeutic expressive arts-based activities. Participation in expressive arts-based activities (EABA) for graduate counseling students is intended to give students an understanding of how clients may experience EABA in therapy. It is in this experiential format of learning that students often express finding a personal therapeutic quality in addition to the academic understanding of EABA. However, there lacks in descriptive literature *how* graduate counseling students experience EABA. Research in this area is important for expressive arts therapy educators because the understanding of how graduate counseling students experience EABA informs pedagogy. Conversely, there currently lacks explicit expressive arts therapy pedagogy for this field of study. Counselor education and specific training in the expressive arts would benefit greatly from a systematic and detailed exploration of students' experiences with EABA, contributing nuances and contextualized understanding to the field of expressive arts therapy pedagogy. In addition, by bridging primarily philosophical and theoretical descriptions of expressive arts with other theories derived from experimental research, flow and event theories respectively, these combined theories hold relevance as a pedagogical tool for educating students in EABA.

This study also relates to higher education pedagogy and educational leadership opportunities in general. The findings from this study discuss the relationship between teacher and student *and* teaching and learning. This knowledge informs educational leaders about the multiple pedagogical practices that foster knowledge making.

To gain a better understanding of graduate counseling students' learning processes in expressive arts education, this study pursues both a primary and secondary research question.

1. How do graduate counseling students describe their experience with expressive arts-based activities? 2. How do flow and event theories align or misalign with students' expressed experiences with EABA in the classroom setting? The research project examines relevant literature against observations of two classes and personal interviews with students and faculty. Using a/r/tographic methodology, this qualitative study explored how graduate counseling students experienced EABA. A/r/tographic methods were presented through artistic interludes that emerged from reflections in the form of a collaged cloth journal.

Three major themes emerged from data analysis: sense of self in learning, physicality, and EABA as pedagogy. Findings indicate that students experienced competing emotions, positionality, affect, and integration from their experiences in EABA. Findings also indicate the teacher and student relationship weighed heavily in students' academic success.

Implications and recommendations for educational administrators are presented. Limitations and suggestions for further research are identified.