How the Creative Arts Can Be Useful Coping Tools for Adolescents

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the impact of using creative arts such as art, music, theatre arts and writing as coping tools and creating a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth and a sense of life and goal direction for adolescents. Drawing on biological, psychological and social data, this researcher wishes to determine whether a relationship between using creative arts as coping tools can enhance adolescents’ ability to cope with their bio-psycho and social growth.
How Creative Arts Can Be Used as Coping Tools by Adolescents

When an adolescent used his or her own creativity through drawing, painting, music or theatre arts, he or she was stimulating his or her personal intelligence. The adolescent was using the prefrontal cortex or executive function in his or her brain. The adolescent then used the creative process to enter into the limbic system of feelings, emotions and behavior in the posterior part of the brain. Hence, the adolescent utilized more of his or her brainpower or intelligence in the creative process. The articles for this literature review gave this researcher a better understanding of the use of creative arts as coping tools for adolescents in their developmental growth period between childhood and adulthood.

Creative Arts

The creative process contributed to the development of human beings all the way back to Helmholtz in 1826. It has been determined by researchers that the creative process can affect the emotions, behavior and intelligence of human beings. In order to study this process more closely, the neuroscientists in the study by Haier (2008, para 27 & 28) utilized both the PET and fMRI brain scanning techniques to determine levels of intelligence in their subjects. It has been proven that “Groups in high schools that use creative techniques help adolescents express their emotions appropriately, behave differently, and gain insight into themselves and others” (Veach & Gladding, 2007, p. 71).

Creativity and Intelligence

In 1926, Wallas, based on the work of Helmholtz (1826), documented the proof of the creative process as a sign of intelligence. The process that Wallas documented, according to Haier et al., (2008, para 22) could be described by any creative person today as their own five-step creative process. It is as follows:
a five-stage process comprised of preparation (the acquisition of skills), incubation (where the problem is internalized), intimation (where a feeling occurs that a solution is on the way), illumination (or a sudden burst of insight), and verification (where the idea is checked against reality and applied). (Haier, 2008, para. 22)

This researcher believed that if the measures of creativity and intelligence correlate, then, it would be wise to encourage adolescents to be creative. Use of the combination of the frontal and posterior brain regions through creativity would be an important element in the development and encouragement of intelligence, especially in adolescence, when the brain is plastic and capable of expansion.

Haier, et al (2008, para 29), found in their neuroimagining research that: (a) not all brains work the same way, (b) some optimal combination of tissue density and activation in frontal and more posterior brain regions appear to underlie both intelligence and creativity, and (c) in some cases less is more best characterizes neuroimaging results in terms of efficiency (with regard to intelligence) and disengagement (with respect to creativity).

In 2007, Veach & Gladding, who used creativity in their high school creative techniques groups, described Sternberg & Lubard’s definition of creativity as “the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original or unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful or meets task constraints)” (Veach & Gladding., p. 72). This author would suggest that adolescent students while engaging these creative techniques are actually using more of their intelligence than the other adolescents, because of their use of more of their neural pathways.
In Klorer’s (2009) article on children’s technology overload, the author made the case that “children today are continually bombarded with visual and auditory stimulation, and many make their connections in cyberspace to the detriment of real-time face-to-face encounters with other people” (p. 80). The author made the case that youth are growing up with so much outside electronic stimulation that they are not learning to create art, have deeper emotional connections to themselves or relate to others and states “in this highly ‘connected’ world, children are not developing sound interpersonal skills” (Klorer, p. 81). This researcher was particularly interested in Klorer’s article because it illustrated that the technical culture has created fewer opportunities to learn how creativity can stimulate the lives of children and adolescents. This, then, has become the challenge for more creative arts education. During a time when electronics have been developed at an enormous rate, the creative arts have taken a backseat in the social growth of adolescents and children. In support of this observation, Klorer states:

In terms of relationship, the lack of interpersonal skills is alarming. It may not be accidental that aggression in schools is on the rise, considering the fact that children are not learning the nuances of reading facial gestures, understanding tone of voice, and retracting or backing down when miscommunication or misperceptions occur. (p.81)

The advent of the television, cellular phones and computers has discouraged adolescents from socializing in a more healthy and interactive way with their peers. It, therefore, has become a challenge for adolescents to understand real social interaction.

The Development of Creative Arts Programs for Adolescents in the Education System

In reaction to the rapid development of technology, such as computers and television, Nelson Goodman founded Project Zero at Harvard University in the late 1960’s. “...Project Zero
focused on the nature of artistic knowledge and the ways in which artistic skills and understanding can be enhanced through well-designed programs in schools and museums” (Gardner, 2000, para. 1). This was instituted, but not all school systems used the research or curriculum development that Project Zero produced.

Because of the development of the sciences and technology for the space programs, very little of the educational effort was being made in the arts and humanities (Gardner, para. 6). “By the middle 1960’s both private and public granting agencies were struck by this asymmetry and determined to correct it, at least a bit” (Gardner, 2000, para. 8).

In 1977, Project Zero published the seminal book on the research, *The Arts and Cognition*, edited by David Perkins and Barbara Leondar. This book was a compilation of articles on the arts from the perspectives of the Project Zero philosophers, psychologists, artists, film specialists, writers, musicians, visual artists, educators, and poets (Gardner, para. 13). The purpose of Project Zero was: “The advancement of the arts through improved education of artists, audiences, and (arts) management” (Gardner, 2000, para. 10).

This researcher had the privilege of studying at the HGSE at the “Mind, Brain and Education” weeklong seminar during the summer of 2010. The Project Zero team indicated that neuroscience will change how educators approach intelligence, creativity, mental illness, developmental growth and education in the future. This research has been the result of Nelson Goodman’s insight back in the 1960’s. Because creativity and intelligence have been linked by neuroscientists as a higher intelligence, the expansion of brain research will illustrate how the creative arts will be able to help solve many types of medical, mental and physical issues at every developmental level.

**The Creative Arts as Self Expression**
In addition, the creative arts and self-expression have become very important factors in adolescents’ lives. “Action within therapy and life is rarely limited to a specific mode of expression. One form of expression tends to flow from another” (McNiff, 1981, p. viii). Therefore, in psychotherapy, limiting the therapeutic process to one particular art form such as theatre arts or music or dance did not allow for some adolescents to fully express themselves. This researcher has found that using just one particular art form was not always effective for any specific student. Rather, combining music and art, art and theatre arts, dance and theatre arts, music and theatre arts, writing and any of the arts, enabled theatre art therapy students to fully communicate their message by creatively drawing or painting their issues therapeutically.

In the theatre arts program sponsored by the 52nd Street Project in Hell’s Kitchen on the west side of New York City, the participants aged nine to eighteen have written, acted in and produced their own plays. There have been numerous actors and theatrically active adolescents for over 28 years involved in the 52nd Street Project’s theatre program. Each participant has been mentored by a professional actor. The actors have supported and encouraged the students to express their own creativity. Over the years the actors have been part of a creative community and experienced a sense of belonging, and they have increased their sense of self-esteem by succeeding at writing, creating and performing in plays. Sandberg-Zakian (2010, p. 171) revealed that when the participants in the 52nd Project put in their own hard work, they felt encouraged to own their identities through that program’s creative theatre arts.

**Summary One: Creative Arts**

Creative education for children and adolescents changed significantly with the advent of technology. It was because of the rapid development of technology and the de-emphasis of art education that Project Zero developed arts curricula. However, technology has grown at such a
rapid rate that even the work at Project Zero has been unable to fully support the development of creative education. Klorer provided an example: “If the television is being used as a babysitter and is not balanced with quality interactions, the child may not be getting the kind of relational stimulation necessary for optimal brain development” (p. 81).

Throughout this research to establish the creative arts as excellent coping methods, the theatre arts were the single largest source of creative art forms, more than art, music, writing, acting and dance. Haier (2008) wrote about the correlation of creativity and intelligence in the brain. Neurologists illustrated that the creative process had five different levels of development, which came from the frontal cortex and the posterior section of the brain. Because of adolescents’ widespread use of electronics, Klorer (2009) documented the need for an outlet in creative arts to teach students socialization. Klorer and others were able to build creative arts programs because of the awareness of the needs for the creative arts in the schools as demonstrated by organizations such as Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE).

Howard Gardner (2000) presented the reasons why Nelson Goodman founded Project Zero in the mid-sixties. Project Zero was developed to increase arts education as a reaction to development of rocket technology, computers and televisions. Children and adolescents have been the beneficiaries of the Project Zero movement to put the arts and humanities into the educational programs.

McNiff (1981) established the case for multiple use of different art forms as the topic of the creative arts. An excellent example of a creative arts/theatre arts program was The 52nd Street Project’s Teen Shakespeare Project. This program took adolescent street youth, selected a working actor to mentor him or her and succeeded in helping the adolescent achieve personal
self-esteem, a sense of belonging and a belief that he or she could set goals and achieve them.

The adolescents learned to use the creative arts as a coping tool.

**Adolescents**

**Biological Development**

Crone (2009) named the period of adolescence a “complex transitional phase in life” (p. 825). Crone’s research was based on ERP (Event-related potentials) and fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) neuroimaging of the executive functions of the brain in the prefrontal cortex. The studies showed the various age levels and how the executive functions change in adolescence. The author’s point was, “Executive functions are thought to be central to human cognition, and therefore adolescence can be seen as a period of significant cognitive advancements” (Crone, 2009, p. 825).

In addition, the article pointed out that, “It is therefore possible that modulations in executive function in adolescence are the result of an imbalance between cognitive (prefrontal cortex) and affective brain networks (limbic system), which would also explain why adolescent behavior is often erratic” (Crone, pp. 827-828).

This article clearly illustrated that the developmental changes in the maturation of the brain contributed to adolescent cognitive and emotional behavior. Crone, citing research from Nelson, Leibonluft, McClure & Pine (2005), also mentioned that, “the heightened sensitivity of subcortical brain regions in adolescence is associated with specific biological changes that affect brain functioning” (2009, p. 829). These biological changes affected the adolescents’ ability to control their emotions and behavior necessitating help in learning how to cope. The creative arts were a perfect outlet to help the adolescents cope with this sensitivity.
Crone, in her summary, referenced an article by Sisk and Zehr on pubertal hormones. The topic of pubertal hormones was very important to both Sisk and Zehr and Crone in their articles. The level of dopamine in the brain system during adolescence became a major factor in adolescent growth. Crone, citing Sisk & Zehr (2005), stated that “…dopaminergic activity increases significantly in early adolescence and is higher in this period than before or after” (2009, p. 829). The authors correlated the dopamine levels in the brain to developmental changes at puberty. “Thus, adolescents who perform at adult level on most executive function tasks may fail to perform at this level under conditions of risk, arousal or social influences” (Crone, 2009, p. 829). This researcher was fascinated with the concept that the brain functions, neural and dopamine levels could control or impact the emotions, social and executive behaviors of adolescents as much as Crone’s study suggested.

Sisk and Zehr (2005) emphasized, “A biological hallmark of puberty is the elevated secretion of gonadal steroid hormones which produce the overt signs of reproductive maturation such as breast development or the appearance of hair” (p. 163). However, further into their study they stated that, “It is important to recognize the onset of puberty not as a gonadal event, but rather as a brain event” (p. 164). Their studies suggested that, early puberty in humans has been identified as a risk factor for a variety of psychopathologies including eating disorders and depression…. Alternatively, the physiological changes associated with early puberty may alter an adolescent’s social experiences during puberty, causing an increased risk for psychopathology. ( p. 170)

Hence, this researcher learned that there is an increased importance in understanding the physiological as well as the psychopathological backgrounds of a particular adolescent before truly diagnosing that individual’s issues. A holistic approach to diagnosis became even more
necessary after reading this article. Adolescent depression and eating disorders became more understandable because of this gonadal hormone research (Sisk & Zehr, p. 170).

**Psychological Development**

Hormonal changes have had the ability to affect the brain growth and, in turn, the physical and emotional development of adolescents. Graybeal (2001, p. 233) cited the American Psychiatric Association (1994), Hersen & Turner (1991) and Mamen (1986) regarding the medical and insurance model on deficit-based understandings of children’s social and emotional difficulties that therapists derived from the psychopathology and paradigm set by the DSM-IV-TR. There have been other sources that based their research on a more positive and holistic focus such as strengths, resources, empowerment, and possibility (Feldman, 2008, p. 85). There was an on-going tension between holistic approaches to assessing and solving problems versus the medical and insurance model created by the DSM-IV-TR.

When this researcher evaluated this struggle between the DSM-IV-TR medical and insurance model versus an holistic approach, it seemed very important to point out that the Adlerian theory of the tasks of life were an holistic approach and comparable to the bio-psycho-social approach to the Individual Psychology of a client’s lifestyle. The Adlerian tasks of life have been about balancing the work, society, sex, spiritual, and self aspects of life. (Mozak, 1977, pp. 93-117). Alfred Adler came upon this theory from the experience of being a medical doctor. Ansbacher & Ansbacher (1964, pp. 1 -5) wrote about how Adler broke away from Freud because of Adler’s medical experience and how he would help his clients work through their issues with homework in the form of giving assignments with an element of social interest. In essence, creative arts therapy has developed as an holistic form of therapy with the social experience as a very important part of the process.
Another form of therapy was the experiential program Feldman (2008) presented in the form of a therapeutic after-school theater program based on performance social therapy. 

Performance social therapy was “a postmodern approach to human development and therapeutic change” (p. 86). The author’s alternative educational approach to child therapy with expressive arts in theatre performance became a form of social therapy. This enabled the children to assume a different viewpoint toward their issues while viewing, writing, or acting in the plays. Feldman stated,

Performance social therapy is an activity in which human beings come together with others and actively organize and reorganize their life space in the creation of a performatory environment—one in which individuals are able to break out of constraining social roles and reactive modes of functioning and do something new. (p.86)

In Feldman’s research, performance social therapy gave the children a forum to experience their particular issues and understand, become aware of the change needed, and then, choose to enact the change or not. Feldman (2008, p. 87) referred frequently to Lev Vygotsky’s 1978 work on learning and development. “Vygotsky recognized that it is through performing, through doing what is beyond oneself, through creative imitation in relational activity, that people learn and develop” (p. 87). This researcher believed in the validity of this process from experience as an adolescent production manager of the dramatics club in high school. By working with one’s peers and experiencing the pressure and emotions of producing plays, this researcher learned to how to work with others and used that experience as a basis of many group production projects over a lifetime of design. Another aspect to this experience was the encouragement this researcher felt in taking on such a large responsibility in adolescent years.
While in class at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, this researcher experienced many references to Vygotsky’s social and emotional developmental theory called ZPD or *zone of proximal development*. ZPD signifies the process by which human beings can do far more with the support of competent others than they can do alone (Feldman, p. 87). In this article Feldman advocated that drama used as therapy was a natural solution to social and behavioral change (p. 95).

*Growing Up Performed*, the theatre group in Feldman (2008) used *performance social therapy* when:

…the children came in whining and complaining. One of the group facilitators led them in a performance that she called the ‘gripe choir.’ Each child chose a gripe… and voiced their gripes on cue; at times there were individual gripes, at other times, a chorus of gripes. It was a wonderfully humorous performance that acknowledged and built with their disgruntledness…the performance helped create an atmosphere of lightheartedness and fun in which the work of the group could advance rather than become bogged down in discontent. (Feldman, p. 90)

This group used performance to change negative attitudes into positive attitudes. This demonstrated how the creative arts can be a useful learning and coping tool. In essence, this was expressive arts in action. This process could be considered a client-centered therapeutic process.

Goldstein (2009) wrote about basic psychological tools such as memorization, verbal skills, the ability to empathize with a character in a play and to have the ability to get into the mind of that character. This technique was called *theory of mind* (p. 7). By using the *theory of mind*, the author referred “to the ability to accurately ‘read’ or infer a person’s inner state given knowledge of the person’s facial expression, body language, prosody, verbal utterances, and
knowledge of information available to the person in question (Perner, 1991; Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001 as cited in Goldstein, p. 7).”

Throughout this article references were made to the research that Goldstein created from childhood recollections of role-playing with peers, with daydreaming, and living in “higher levels of engagement in the fictional worlds of books and movies” (Goldstein, p. 7). Goldstein referred to the importance of an actor’s ability to empathize with the character that he or she portrays. “It is often claimed that acting teaches empathy, perhaps because actors must put themselves in the shoes of their character and feel that character’s feelings” (p. 7).

The challenge for an actor was to get into the character and communicate through acting the emotions of that character. This was, in fact, a form of Method acting (p. 8). Relating to past emotional experiences allowed the actor to create an emotional response for the particular character he or she was playing. “Because actors must use their emotions, both negative and positive, in their work, it is reasonable to hypothesize that actors should be particularly accepting of their emotions and less likely to suppress them” (p.8). The term Goldstein used was adaptive emotion regulation, a very important capability (p.8). Thus, the interpretations by the actors were based upon a deep psychological knowledge of their characters.

Having the ability to get into the character’s whole being was emphasized in this article. Because of early childhood play-acting and role-playing, the actors became more authentic in their acting process. “Actors need to be able to call up an emotion on cue and to recall what a specific emotion feels like in real life so that they can reproduce it onstage” (p. 8). “The ability to understand and to control one’s emotions is referred to by psychologists as emotion regulation” (Gross, 1998 as cited in Goldstein, 2009, p. 8). The assumption that the adolescents were capable to regulate their emotions was a sign of their creative intelligence. Not every
adolescent had those capabilities. Thus, the actors’ understanding of their emotional abilities and creative intelligence became a reassuring aspect of their lives.

**Social Development**

Hocking (2010) wrote about the New Urban Arts studio program for adolescents in Providence, Rhode Island. He described the Arts Mentoring, the Summer Arts Inquiry and the Studio Team Advisory Board as a studio that “serves to establish and reinforce forms of learning that encourage the development of artistic practice, critical thinking, and leadership” (p. 48). New Urban Arts has succeeded at building a creative space that empowers young people to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives (p. 54).

In the broader picture this program provided a “community of practice – a space in which participants are known, feel safe, and understand that their voice, affinities, and questions are respected and heard” (Hocking, p. 50). In addition,

Learners are invited into art traditions and helped to develop the necessary creative and critical skills to succeed in achieving personal goals, regardless of whether those goals are aesthetic, social or related to another sphere of human experience. In this way, the program enables young people to see creativity as a holistic dimension of their life and as a means, one among many, for creating meaning. (p. 50)

This researcher resonated with Peter Hocking’s viewpoint on New Urban Arts. The organization’s approach, enabling students to feel free to take creative risks and not to be concerned with whether their creativity and self-expression must have monetary value, was a very freeing creative concept. Instead, the participants were given the opportunity “to see art as a mode of social change—engaging creative practice as expressive, persuasive, and exhortatory voice” (p. 52).
Summary Two: Adolescents

Neurological research has become an integral part of the analysis for both biological and psychological development in adolescents. Crone (2009) evaluated the ERP and fMRI research regarding adolescent brain development and their executive abilities in relation to cognitive behavior patterns while doing particular tasks. The author claimed that, “It is therefore possible that modulations in executive function in adolescence are the result of an imbalance between cognitive and affective brain networks, which would also explain why adolescent behavior is often erratic” (Crone, pp. 828-829).

In actuality, the brain research was able to detail particular areas that cause cognitive and other behaviors. Specifically, Crone cited both Galvan et al., (2006) and Hare et al., (2008) by stating:

…studies have shown that adolescent development is typically characterized by immature prefrontal cortex activity (important for cognitive control and intelligent behavior) and enhanced responses in subcortical affective systems (important for emotional responses), suggesting an intensification of emotional experience and an immature capacity of affective regulation and self-control in adolescence. (Crone, p. 829)

In addition to the changes in the adolescent brain related to cognitive behavior, the biological effects of gonadal steroid hormones also affected the brain development in adolescent maturation. According to Sisk and Zehr (2005), the timing of the gonadal hormones affects the neural circuits and can cause eating disorders and depression in both male and female adolescents (p. 170).

The adolescent emotional balance was also affected by the neural circuit changes and the hormone changes. Goldstein (2009) and Feldman (2008) presented cases of working creatively
with adolescents with emotional, cognitive and behavioral developmental issues. They both used theatre expression and acting as therapeutic ways to work through the adolescents’ changeable behaviors. Goldstein (2009) states, “I believe that actors should have strengths in theory of mind, empathy, and adaptive emotion regulation” (p. 8).

Feldman (2008) used therapeutic and useful creative performance such as the “gripe choir” to help the adolescents learn how to understand and use their behavior as a learning and coping tool. “Through performance social therapy, people (adolescents especially) are supported to continually reinvent themselves and to remake their situations in collective activity” (p. 94).

According to Hocking (2010), “New Urban Arts reminds me (the author) that the arts can be taught as a means of preparing vital social actors to constructively engage whatever issues confront them” (p. 54). New Urban Arts was about the community, the individual and the holistic way of life. The New Urban Arts community exhibited a great example of the Adlerian tasks of life, individual, community and love relationships (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, pp. 1-2).

**Creative Arts as Coping Tools**

**Creative Arts**

For the purpose of this paper, this researcher chose to use the term creative arts to encompass visual art, music, theatre arts and music. Creative arts were considered to be a means of individual and group artistic expression.

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) as cited in Suldo, Shaunessy, & Hardesty (2008) stated the definition of coping as “…constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources
of the person, regardless of whether the outcomes of such efforts are positive or negative” (p. 274)

**Coping Tools**

The basis of this paper was to illustrate adolescents’ need for coping tools and the creative arts as a method to help them de-stress from their developmental issues of growing, hormonal change and its results, competition within peer groups, drugs, use of drugs and alcohol, and academic and parental and social pressures. The issue, then, became what types of stress do adolescents have. Suldo and colleagues (2008) offered comprehensive research regarding the types of coping strategies adolescents used in reaction to their stressors. The assessments included a Perceived Stress Scale (PSS); Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (ACOPE; Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; The Youth Self Report form of the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001); Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS; Huebner, 1991); Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C; Muris, 2001); and Grade Point Average (GPAs), (p. 278-280).

The goals of these assessments were to see how two groups, one from a challenging academic program and one from a general education program (both a part of the same academic high school), perceived the stress in their lives (Suldo et al., p. 275). Some of these assessments were daunting, such as the Achenbach or Youth Self-Report, which consisted of 112 questions (p. 279).

Suldo et al., (p. 278) presented specific positive and negative coping strategies. This researcher felt that they needed to be documented because some were useful, some were typical,
and some were alternative coping strategies for the adolescents. They were: *Positive appraisal coping* that appraised stressful situations; *Negative avoidance coping* such as drugs and alcohol; *Family communication coping* as support during times of stress; and *Anger coping* such as sarcasm, yelling, and complaining. (Suldo et al., p. 278-279)

The analysis of coping reactions as positive and negative illustrated how the adolescents behaved in Suldo et al.’s research. It was natural to have reactions. The point was to understand how to teach adolescents to cope with their stressful life experiences. Using positive techniques was the optimal approach. “*Negative avoidance coping* is primarily comprised of items related to substance abuse (e.g., smoking, drinking, illicit drug use); the finding that *negative avoidance coping* may serve to compromise life satisfaction is consistent with the findings of Zullig, Valois, Huebner, Oeltmann, and Drane, 2001” (Suldo et al., p. 286).

**Visual Art**

Cukierkorn (2008) cited Clark & Zimmerman’s (1998) references to adolescents and the correlation of creativity and intelligence. The author stated that, “usually recognized for outstanding drawing ability, young visual artists also may excel because they demonstrate original ideas or innovations independent of their advanced drawing skills. Other indicators of talent in the arts may be high levels of motivation, passion, perseverance, or problem-solving skills” (p. 24).

In support of this concept of intelligence and creative processing, Cukierkorn (2008) wrote:

... artists visualize and set goals to find and define a problem, choose techniques to collect data, reflect on their work, consider alternative points of view, evaluate and revise the problem, solution, try out changes, and begin the cycle of revision again. Comparing this
process to the scientific method makes a convincing argument for all the arts as a critical and complex experience of discovery. (p. 32)

**Visual arts as coping skills**

Cukierkorn, (p. 24-33), used a hypothetical adolescent, Frankie, as an example of a talented 17-year-old creative artist in the article, which inferred that artistic adolescents were misunderstood. Frankie, for example, was fortunate because he had a very supportive and encouraging mother. “Frankie feels that his mother’s willingness to let him be ‘a free person’ has contributed greatly to the development of his talent” (p. 26).

In addition, Cukierkorn studied two hundred and seventy-two students in grades 9 through 12 from a public arts conservatory instructional center in the Southeastern United States. What interested this researcher was that Curkierkorn chose to use both an intelligence assessment, “Ravens Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM; Raven, Raven, & Court, 2000) and two different measures of self-concept, The Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQII; Marsh, 1990), and the Art Self-Perception Inventory (ASPI; Vispoel, 1993, p. 27). The author found that the creative arts students scored higher than average on the self-concept assessments.

This sampling proved that encouragement and a supportive, creative environment helped the students to believe in their talent and to succeed. This was not always the case. Cukierkorn cited Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1993) stating that they “found that talented female visual artists perceived themselves as having poor family relations….and that young male visual artists expressed anxiety about peer relations, the mean scores for self-concept in same-sex relationships and opposite-sex relationships” (p. 72). In addition, Cukierkorn cited Sternberg and Lubart (1993) when they stated “that people of high mental ability are predisposed to creative acts when other characteristics are also present” (p. 32).
To this researcher the importance of encouragement and a good self-concept correlated with the theme of creative arts being used as coping tools. Each adolescent needed to believe in his or her own self-image in order to integrate into the creative arts community. Believing in themselves enabled the artists to show their talents and believe in what they did. If there was any low self-esteem, the participation in the art groups in both articles [Cukierkorn (2008) and Hocking (2010)] became the creative spaces to learn and use art forms. Thus, these talented youth used their personal creativity and intelligence as a form of coping with their emotional reactions to what they were experiencing.

Dalebroux, Goldstein, & Winner (2008) wrote about using art as a short-term therapeutic method of mood repair. This researcher found this article to be an excellent support for the theory that creative arts could be useful coping tools for people generally, and adolescents in particular.

Dalebroux (2008) building upon earlier proposals by Larsen et al., (1996) and Larsen et al., (1987) offered coping strategies that included “…venting—the expression of one’s negative feelings, and fantasy—daydreaming or positive distraction in order to forget one’s negative feelings” (p. 288). Larsen et al (1987) added a third strategy, “distraction (without positive fantasy), or keeping busy as a way of forgetting” (Larson as cited in Dalebroux, p. 289). These articles raised the question of how one could achieve a mental state that could help cope with the various issues on which he or she was working. Dalebroux et al. stated “…it seems reasonable to assume that the creating of a work of art (whether by a serious artist or by a non-artist making a sketch, humming a tune, doodling, etc.) results in a more positive emotional state after the act of creating than before” (p. 289). These authors illustrated that the creative artists themselves could alter their own mental and emotional states.
Dalebroux and colleagues (p. 289) based their research on the three strategies Larsen had presented: venting, fantasy and distraction through the creative arts. There was evidence of positive mood repair from short-term art projects that created images in reaction to negative experiences. This test offered the choice of drawing, painting or writing to resolve the trauma of negative experiences. Art showed short-term success and writing seemed to require a longer time to create positive mood repair. This article illustrated that there was more than one art form to use for venting, fantasy creative thinking and distraction strategies. (p. 290)

**Music**

Veach & Gladding (2007) cited Ostland & Kinnier, (1997) stating: “Music is popular with teenagers and is a particularly powerful source of social communication and social influence in high school” (p. 72). Music can set a mood for adolescents and lyrics can be important to their social life. Veach & Gladding cited Bushong (2002) and stated: “Popular music is both a reflection of and an exacerbating influence upon attitudes, values, and behaviors” (p. 72).

This researcher’s experience suggests that the creative aspect of music and music therapy can help the adolescents verbalize their internalized emotions. Veach & Gladding stated, “to foster a preventative and therapeutic process, counselors can work with adolescents using a number of song-writing techniques” (p. 72). The authors cited Coldstein (1990,) by suggesting that the music therapist could use techniques such as “changing the words to familiar songs, filling in the blanks of edited familiar songs, vocal improvisation, adding new verses to known songs, parodying the familiar songs, and using natural rhythms of speech as a starting point” (p. 119).
In Veach & Gladding’s research they suggested that by rewriting or creating their own lyrics, adolescents began to have a voice they never had. Teenagers used lyrics and music composition as a means of voicing their pain, their happiness and their anger. Adolescents used whatever form of expression that was most cathartic for them. Therefore, creating music became a forum for political, social and personal change.

**Theatre Arts**

“Adolescents are often dramatic in their actions. Their participation in a number of ritualistic activities, such as sports or on stage, provides them with opportunities to play out parts of life in a highly charged, physical way and to keep their impulses in check” (Veach & Gladding, 2007, p. 76). Adolescent theatre performances were an excellent example of both drama therapy and psychodrama. For centuries plays have encouraged actors to work through personal issues. “Drama can be used to assist adolescents in gaining greater control over their lives, as well as in learning new roles” (Veach & Gladding, p. 76).

A drama technique called *role-playing* is also used as a psychotherapy technique. In *role-plays*, “which last for 15 minutes, each of the supporting actors tries passionately to persuade the protagonist to choose his or her point of view. After time is called, the protagonist shares with others in the group the thoughts and feelings that emerged in making a decision” p. 76). This *acting-out or role-playing* helped the adolescents communicate their feelings and emotions. Thus, acting became a coping tool for the adolescent who found acting out his or her issues to be very therapeutic.

Over the past three years, this researcher has experienced this therapeutic process with the actors of blank slate theatre. The actors have written, produced and performed in the productions of each play. While in production, this researcher has performed art therapeutic
experientials to help these adolescent thespians process the deeply emotional experience of acting-out parts that push the emotional limits of acting parts that are more powerfully emotional than some of the actors have experienced. The blank slate theatre production of the play *Generations* was the basis for this researcher’s thesis. The invitation and announcement for the play explained why this researcher believed in theatre arts as a true coping tool:

A therapist’s office. A dance studio. And John Lennon. A story of hope amidst suffering, hearing amidst trauma, and forgiveness amidst anger. Walk with young Teagan as she stumbles (gracefully) through recovery from abuse within her family, and finds salvation in a compassionate therapist, newfound friendships, and the artistic medium of dance. A blank slate theatre original.

This play was written, performed and produced by adolescents. The theme of the blank slate theatre production was how abuse was passed down through generations of one family. The central character, Teagan, was an adolescent confronting her abuse issues and her inner child through *role-playing* and therapeutically resolving her emotional baggage. blank slate theatre was an independent, not-for-profit theatre group whose mission was to support and encourage adolescents through this important developmental period of their lives.

Feldman states:

In school settings, drama has been used to reduce aggression (Bundy, 2000); to enhance social interaction between students with and without mental retardation (Miller et al., 1993); to encourage team work (O’Day, 1996); to enhance observation and reflection of oneself and others (Naumer, 1999); to retain the creativity and playfulness often lost upon leaving early childhood (Dunn, 1998); to enhance self-expression (Jackson and Bynum,
Writing

Because adolescents wrote and performed in the blank slate production of *Generations*, the emotions suggested and actors’ performances illustrated forms of therapeutic writing and drama. The emotional impact of the words they wrote and the parts they performed may well have been very cathartic for the writers and performers.

The use of literature, creative writing and bibliotherapy was a very effective therapeutic tool for Veach & Gladding (2007) in their study of adolescent creative arts group therapies, consistent with the citing of Kelasch & Emry (2003), “… to obtain the most potential from this process, which is known as bibliotherapy, adolescents need to go through four distinct stages—identification, catharsis, insight and universality. Through these four processes the adolescent performers sense themselves in the characters and were then able to relate themselves to the story...” (p.75). In addition, Veach & Gladding stated, “Finally, adolescents reach the stage of universality where they realize that their own issues are shared with others and their empathy and sensitivity are enhanced. In this final stage, a connection is made with the larger world outside of the immediate one in which adolescents live” (p. 76). These adolescents experienced a sense of belonging in a creative community. Processing with their peers became the support that they needed. This was stated by many of the actors this researcher worked with at blank slate theatre.

**Summary Three: Creative Arts as Coping Tools**

In Dalebroux et al., (2008, p. 288), the authors used the term *mood repair* as a term for a coping solution. In Feldman (2008, p. 94) the term *performance social therapy* relates to the coping solution used at *Growing Up Performed*, the adolescent theatre group. The *performance*
social therapy could also be considered drama therapy, a term used by a number of theatre troupes. Goldstein (2009) stated, “Strategies of emotion regulation have important effects on health and stress, and therefore finding ways to encourage acceptance rather than suppression of emotions is important” (p.8). Goldstein (2009) has written:

Levy (1997) argued that involvement in theatre can help children learn about morals and values, through its use as a school for feeling. Educated emotions, Levy argued, respond more morally than uneducated emotions, leading to increases in empathy, although Levy’s definition of empathy in this case is closer to what I (Goldstein, the author) might call sympathy. (p.8)

Cukierkorn’s (2008) research and assessments concluded that “theatre artists had significantly higher self-concept of physical abilities than visual artists” (p. 28). This suggested that theatre arts needed to be encouraged for those with low self-concepts. Dalebroux et al., (2008) and Cukierkorn (2008) determined that the creative processes for coping with the emotional, psychological and social behaviors of adolescents should include art expression through painting and writing. Veach & Gladding (2007) took a group approach with adolescents in the use of drama, writing, bibliotherapy, and music. Peer support in group settings helped individuals process and cope with their issues. Dalebroux et al., (2008) wrote of the three coping strategies that Larson et al., (1987), Larsen et al., (1996), and Larsen (2000) proposed of “venting, fantasy and distraction” through coping tools such as writing and visual art.

Master’s Summary

This paper presented a creative arts approach to viewing coping skills for adolescents. This researcher began with the neurological explanation for creativity and intelligence,
proceeded to the encouragement of arts education through Project Zero (with Nelson Goodman’s legacy) and then, explored the creative arts that could be used by the adolescents as coping tools. In addition, this review analyzed the bio-psycho-social aspects of adolescence in an attempt to understand what caused adolescence to be such a challenge. Creative arts were determined to be useful coping tools to help adolescents during this developmental phase.

The coping strategies presented illustrated the need for adolescents to believe in themselves, to find encouragement and to experience a sense of belonging to a community such as New Urban Arts Studio, blank slate theatre, Grow Up Performed and The 52nd Street Project Teen Shakespeare Theatre. It was through the creative arts such as art, music, theatre arts and writing that adolescents could find the means to cope and evolve through this difficult period in their lives.
References


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