Creations of Confidence: Writing Workshops to Promote Youth Self-Esteem and Expression

Presentation for NLCAHR: Arts & Health
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Introduction

- Community of Shea Heights-Blackhead, NL
- Concerns of untreated mental illness in this population
- Young population: almost 1/3rd of residents under age 24*
- Lower SES: Average couple family income 30% less than provincial average*

*Community Accounts, 2016
Today’s Canadian youth are increasingly at risk of mental illness*

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Canadians ages 15-24*

Many young people don’t receive timely intervention

Only 1 in 5 children who needs mental health services receives them*

Shea Heights Community Alliance established in 2012 to address this problem in Shea Heights-Blackhead

*Canadian Mental Health Association, 2016
Shea Heights Community Alliance

- Founded in 2012
- Shea Heights Community Board, Shea Heights Community Health Centre, and St. John Bosco School
- Mission: “Promote community health and well-being in Shea Heights, with a focus on the community’s youth”
- Past initiatives: Drama Program, Shea Heights Youth Council, Visual Arts Program (2016)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-choHW9tYo
The Role of the Arts in Mental Health

- Arts interventions have been of recent interest
- To assist treatment of depression, substance use, neighbourhood violence, and general life stressors
- Emotion-Regulation Theory* of creative writing
- Writing about stressful experiences can help to regulate emotions**
- Creative writing has also been shown to influence identity development and self-esteem***

* Lepore et al., 2002
** Kliewer et al., 2011
*** Chandler, 1999
Research Question

- Do creative-writing based arts interventions, delivered in 5 sessions over the course of a month, increase the self-esteem and expressive abilities of students in grades 6-9 at St. John Bosco School?
Methods

- Study took place at St. John Bosco School, Shea Heights
- Participants were students in grades 6-9, recruited through posters and school newsletter
- 5 creative writing sessions delivered over the course of a month: March-April 2017
- Participants wrote poems, short stories, and journals throughout the course of the program
- Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys assessed self-esteem, expressivity, and attitudes towards mental health
Survey questions: Self-esteem and expressivity

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<tr>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel good about myself</td>
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<td>I can speak up in a group</td>
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<td>I am able to do things as well as most other people</td>
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<td>I would talk to someone if something was bothering me</td>
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<td>I like most things about myself</td>
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<td>I can help others come up with good ideas</td>
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<td>I can express my feelings about things that are bothering me</td>
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<td>I can share my feelings creatively</td>
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Survey questions: Attitudes toward mental health & mental illness

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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>It would be embarrassing to have a mental health problem</td>
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<td>If I had mental health problems, I would not tell any of my friends</td>
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<td>Anyone can have mental health problems</td>
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<td>I know where people can go to seek help for mental health problems</td>
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<td>A person with a mental health problem is able to be a good friend</td>
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<td>Students with mental health problems shouldn’t be in regular classes</td>
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<td>I would talk to someone with a mental health problem</td>
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“What 3 words come to mind when you think of mental health?”
Data Analysis

- Analysis took place in May-June of 2017
- Pre-Program and Post-Program surveys were analyzed, independently and together
- Survey answers ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree)
- The answer to each question was scored from 1-6
- Mean and Mode were calculated for each question
Results and Discussion

- The Pre-Program survey showed high levels of baseline self-esteem, as well as positive attitudes towards mental health.
- All parameters, however, showed an improvement between pre-program and post-program.
- Improvements on self-esteem, expressivity, and attitudes towards mental health.
Conclusion

- Creative writing can help improve self-esteem, expressivity, and attitudes toward mental health in young people.
- This study supports the effectiveness of arts interventions.
- It was a small-scale study, so statistical significance is not possible.
- Future research should implement these concepts using a larger population and longer timeline.
References


