

Journaling: An Underutilized School Counseling Tool

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### Abstract

The effectiveness of journaling as a therapeutic and teaching tool is well documented. However, specific examples of school counselors utilizing journaling as a therapeutic tool are sparse. Existing school counseling literature was reviewed and journaling as an educational and therapeutic tool was explored and related to the school counseling environment. Suggestions for using journaling as an effective school counseling resource were offered and possible applications of online and paper and pencil journaling as a school counseling tool were presented.

## Journaling: An Underutilized School Counseling Tool

For school counselors seeking a flexible intervention that can be utilized in individual counseling, small groups, or classroom guidance, journaling provides a solution that has been well supported in other fields. Although school counseling and journaling have been shown to positively affect physical, emotional and mental health, journaling continues to be an underutilized school counseling tool. Journaling saves time because there is a limited amount of face-to-face contact time in group and one-on-one counseling sessions. Journaling can be implemented in one-on-one sessions, small group sessions, or as an integral part of classroom guidance. Students benefit from journaling as a therapeutic tool, as an avenue for storytelling, as a tool to assist in recovery from trauma, and as a cross-grade writing interaction tool. Students also benefit when journals are used as a tool to improve group dynamics in classes or small groups, as a problem solving tool, as a tool to encourage emotional healing from issues such as divorce, loss of a family member, friendship issues, and many other issues (Allan & Bertoia, 2003). The purpose of this article is to discuss the benefits of journaling for school counselors, and their clients.

Due to the lack of available research relating to journaling in the school counseling environment, the teaching and learning benefits of journaling, as well as the therapeutic benefits of journaling, are reviewed and related to the school counseling environment. Current applications of journaling in clinical work and classrooms are presented, and applications of e-journaling and paper and pencil journaling in school counseling settings are recommended. Examples of how to use journaling in school counseling settings are also provided. The continuing evolution from traditional paper-

and-pencil journals to journaling on the Internet is examined, and possible directions and applications for future research are discussed.

The intellectual, reflective, and interactive processes of journaling make it a resourceful therapeutic, teaching, learning, and counseling tool. Many therapists use the journal as a supplement to face to face counseling to support and facilitate the self-exploration process (Youga, 1995). Journaling as an opportunity for self-examination leads to self-discovery, self-evaluation, and self-expression which often clarifies obscure problems and leads to positive change (Burnett & Meacham, 2002; White & Murray, 2002). Educators often apply this exploration process to encourage connections between course concepts and student experiences (Hettich, 1990). Journals in the educational environment allows teachers to gauge students' learning related to set teaching objectives, improve student writing, encourage personal expression, and allow students to reflect on evolving insights (Hiemstra, 2001). Hiemstra suggests journaling be used to assist students to "obtain the maximum amount of interaction, knowledge, and personal growth from their reading efforts or other learning experiences (p. 20)."

### Journaling and School Counseling

Journaling holds many benefits for school counseling environments. For example, even the simple act of disclosure has been shown to produce positive health benefits (L'Abate, 2001; Pennebaker, 2001). Pennebaker (2001) identified reductions in inhibition, changes in the cognitive structure of an event, and alterations in individuals' social worlds as the three factors that promote positive health. Disclosure involves emotional expression, which we have seen is an essential component of improved mental and physical health. A focused version of disclosure, called focused expressive

writing (FEW), has been investigated and shown to be a powerful therapeutic tool. FEW is the guided process of writing about one's past and traumas, creating an organization of past events in a structured environment that allows for an integration of thoughts and feelings, giving clients control over their lives (Esterling & Pennebaker, 2001). Powerful results followed using this journaling technique included a significant drop in physician visits, fewer missed classes for students, improved liver enzyme functioning, and various positive physical health outcomes (Esterling & Pennebaker, 2001). Researchers have speculated that the power of these written therapies results from the cognitive restructuring, the construct accessibility, and the effect of re-representation and re-organization of traumatic memories (L'Abate, 2001). In other words, focused journaling transforms emotions and images into words, changing the way trauma-relevant memories are retrieved and represented.

In the 1980's, school counselors utilized journaling strategies as part of a school guidance program (Buttery & Allan, 1981), as a therapeutic writing unit (Brand, 1987), and within special education programs (Levinson, 1982). Poetry was used within a written expression unit (Gladding, 1987) and has a history of being utilized in combination with other expressive writing counseling interventions (Brand, 1987). In the 1990's, the first edition of a useful book, *Written Paths to Healing*, was published detailing numerous approaches for implementing journaling into school counseling from a Jungian perspective (Allan & Bertoia, 2003), although the suggestions are applicable no matter the counselor's theoretical orientation. Applicable examples of detailed implementation plans include utilizing picture and writing journals, utilizing letter writing as a therapeutic tool, using storytelling in groups, and setting up cross-grade writing

interactions. The book also details how to employ writing as a crisis intervention, and how to use writing in classroom guidance units to improve group dynamics. Chapters in the book are devoted to applying journaling as a tool to resolve problems, in divorce groups, as a method of emotional healing, and as a vital aspect of any guidance curriculum. *Written Paths to Healing* is the most useful resource found for guidance in implementing journaling into a school counseling program. However, the book is written strictly from the author's experiences and is not based on other evidence-based publications. In fact, aside from the resources detailed above, few articles were found addressing journaling in the school counseling environment. It seems a gap exists in the literature related to the many possible uses of journaling in school counseling, especially in the last two decades.

### *Online Journaling*

Journaling to promote learning and instigate emotional therapeutic processes has traditionally been done with paper and pencil. Examples of traditional paper and pencil writing are letter writing in couples or group therapy, learning journals in education, assorted methods of disclosure, response journaling, reflective journaling, guided journaling, unsent therapeutic letters, or any of the other strategies mentioned above. However, using the Internet, these same interventions can now be implemented across vast physical distances.

Currently, online journals seem to be used most often by instructors at the university level wishing to supplement classroom time and encourage deeper exploration and learning. These collaborative journals (between professor and student) can be done in numerous ways. Usually, email is involved, as the journals are guided by

handouts given in class or posted on the instructor's course website. These instructions serve to structure and guide the exploration in order to direct the depth and direction of the students' internal and external explorations. In brief, students are asked to respond to reading assignments, articulate new ideas, perhaps anonymously review and comment on other student's journal entries, and participate in a structured dialog with the teacher and sometimes the whole class (Longhurst & Sandage, 2004; Parkyn, 1999). These collaborative, structured learning journals are delivered via course websites, email, or handouts. Class dialog can occur within online environments such as WebCT (online classroom technology), NetMeeting, Blackboard, or other educational course technologies. Basic reflective or guided journaling is normally communicated through email from student to professor. Existing outcome-based studies have been completed with university level students (see Longhurst & Sandage, 2004; Parkyn, 1999), however, the benefits of online journaling could apply to other levels of education, such as middle school and high school as well. Further studies need to be done to explore online journaling with these populations.

Online journaling can result in the same educational and therapeutic results as traditional paper and pencil journaling (Longhurst & Sandage, 2004). Longhurst and Sandage (2004) reported using journaling assignments to provide fast feedback to their students, create a comfortable structured dialog with students, connect readings to coursework, promote active learning, and as an assessment tool. They report email as their chosen communication tool, yet identify digital drop boxes, blogs, course Web sites, and web-based bulletin boards as other methods of implementing journaling.

In another educational setting, journaling is being used to assist in expanding the cognitive and affective learning experiences of nursing students (Daroszewski, Kinser, & Lloyd, 2004). Directed journaling was used to guide students through analysis, reflection, and critiquing of specific events and other clinical objectives of the course. Daroszewski et al., (2004) found journaling to be a valuable resource to promote thought processes, clinical decision making, class collaboration, discussion, mentoring, socialization, introspection, peer mentoring and skill development such as empathy, observation, critical thinking, discussion and sharing of feelings within the nursing program. The journaling assignments were implemented using a course Web site, to which students had 24-hour access. "Students were responsible for posting one in-depth journal entry per week, including goals, objectives, clinical activities, reflection on those activities, and discussion of one of the designated topics" ((Daroszewski, Kinser, & Lloyd, 2004, p. 177). At the end of the two quarter community health course, students were assessed on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the journaling. They reported the process as highly valuable and effective.

In addition to the educational examples above, online journaling has been shown to provide a therapeutic adjunct in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa, afford patients with chronic lower back pain a more efficient way to monitor and record their ratings of pain for research, lead to creative student collaborations in a high school language arts class, and provide a place where adolescent girls feel safe enough to self-disclose (Jamison, Raymond, Levine, Slawsby, Nedeljkovic, & Katz, 2001; Kajder, Bull, & Van Noy, 2004; Stern, 2002; Yager, 2001). Online journaling, whether through email, blogs,



course Web sites, or NetMeeting provides teachers, counselors and therapists with a flexible avenue with which to deliver services through assorted journaling strategies.

The research discussed above suggests that journaling has been shown to be an effective teaching, learning, and therapeutic tool. Online journaling has been implemented in varied educational settings resulting in equal educational and therapeutic results in relation to traditional paper and pencil journaling. There are, however, certain aspects of online journaling which are different from traditional paper and pencil: (a) Online journaling can reduce the disruption of geographic distance or lengthy intervals between counseling or therapeutic sessions by providing continuity of work, introspection, structure, and goal achievement outside of face-to-face time. For example, class times or clinical meetings normally occur only once a week, while journaling assignments can occur multiple times each week; (b) Online journaling reduces paperwork and enables the counselor to digitally keep track of journaling assignments and client and student progress; (c) The Internet allows for creativity. Teachers and counselors can assign or provide structured or unstructured journaling with any prompt, guideline, or structure they can imagine. Web streaming video, flash video, course web design programs, existing websites, pictures, sounds, and other online resources are available to any instructor/counselor who wishes to create something for students/clients to critique, analyze, explore, and respond. The journaling assignment is limited only by the instructors'/counselors' imagination and skill; and (d) Online journaling can provide a helpful alternative for those who find traditional face-to-face counseling intimidating and avoid it (L'Abate, 2001).

### Evolution of Journaling

Over thousands of years, journaling has been used for a variety of communication needs, such as travel journaling, communal and public record keeping, and expressive communications (Lowenstein, 1987). History provides evidence of the extreme flexibility of the journal, showing both the public and the private relationship between the journal and its writer. Today, one can see evidence of the continuing flexibility of this written form in dieting journals, dream analysis, personal love diaries, adolescent journal keeping, published journals, therapeutic journals, and e-journals (Youga, 1995).

The evolution of the personal journal led to an emphasis shift from the environmental effects on the writer to an emphasis on the self in relation to people, events, and ideas (Lowenstein, 1987). The modern personal journal has been widely used over the past century in the women's movement and in psychotherapy. One of the first therapists to extensively use journals to enhance psychotherapy was Ira Progoff through the 1960's and 1970's. Progoff (1975) used the journal as an instrument to "progressively draw each person's life toward wholeness at its own tempo (p. 9)." Progoff founded his approach on the belief that the journal can help individuals identify their own resources and draw them out to assist in the path toward wholeness. Daily recordings of conversations, events, and dreams all allow individuals to discover and apply the inner resources they might not have known they had and apply these resources to achieve wholeness (Progoff, 1975). Around that same time, others were using writing tools to create open ended, theoretically based, expressive writing experiences (McKinney, 1976), in group counseling sessions (Powers & Hahn, 1977)

and to correspond with clients outside face-to-face sessions (Hofling, 1979; Oberkirch, 1983; Rosenbaum, 1977). Pennebaker and Beal (Pennebaker, 1997) continued the application of journaling in psychotherapy and found statistically significant differences when contrasting undergraduates who wrote about their hurts for 20 minutes a day for four consecutive days with a control group who did not. A replication study by L'Abate (2001) produced consistent results.

### *Journaling as a Learning and Teaching Tool*

Journaling is a multi-faceted, flexible, dynamic, process that leads the writer through evolving insights based on conversations with self, others, or imagined others (Hiemstra, 2001). Zacharias (1991) found a relationship between journaling and students' development of thinking operations such as "comparing, summarizing, observing, classifying, interpreting, criticizing, looking for assumptions, imagining, collecting and organizing data, hypothesizing, applying facts and principles, decision-making, and coding" (p. 265). Journaling provides an environment which motivates cognitive and affective evolution within the writer. It can be used to encourage active involvement in the process of acquiring learning skills. Further, because it involves collaboration between body and mind and engages hand, eye, and brain in a multi-dimensional mode of learning, journaling results in active involvement in the acquisition and processing of learning skills through the exploration inherent in the writing process (Hettich, 1990; Hiemstra, 2001; Zacharias, 1991).

Many types of journals can be used to facilitate different educational and therapeutic experiences, including learning journals, diaries, dream logs, autobiographies, life stories, memoirs, spiritual journals, professional journals,

interactive reading logs, and theory logs (Hiemstra, 2001). Part of the intrinsic value contained within the journaling process is the personal involvement in the connection of the affective and cognitive domains and the accessibility of the knowledge in relation to self and environment that results in a natural way of thinking, organizing and constructing meaning for the writer involved in the learning process.

Educators have used journaling to successfully enhance learning, promote self-reflection and perception change, positively impact student performance on tests and projects, reduce anxiety before major events or tests, and create a process of change within the learning environment (Black, Sileo, & Prater, 2000; Boud, 2001; Dart, Boulton-Lewis, Brownlee, & McCrindle, 1998; Fulwiler, 1987; Garmon, 1998; Hettich, 1990; McCrindle & Christensen, 1995; Miller, 1997; Sgoutas-Emch & Johnson, 1998). Since learning is a process of acquiring cognitive strategies, journaling can lead students to (a) an increased awareness of self; (b) knowledge of strategies needed to achieve a cognitive goal; and (c) practice in the selection, execution, monitoring, and control of these cognitive strategies used to reach the goal (McCrindle & Christensen, 1995).

As stated above, McCrindle and Christensen (1995) argue that a student's metacognitive process of learning moves through awareness of self and environment to an acquisition of cognitive strategies. Subsequently, the student's application of these cognitive strategies to learning goals results in an increase in academic performance. Journaling leads the learner through the process of actively engaging and acquiring cognitive strategies such as rehearsal, organization, and elaboration. These strategies link existing knowledge and new knowledge of self with the environment, resulting in

acquisition and retention of information. Each of these three strategies, that is, rehearsal, organization, and elaboration, contributes to an effective, active, and dynamic process of learning. Journaling encourages learners to reflect, self-regulate and manage their own learning processes (McCrindle & Christensen, 1995). The process of questioning, seeking meaning, and exploring inherent in the journaling process motivates the student to develop new approaches to learning. Students' growing awareness of their own learning processes enhances their cognitive control over these processes, leading to an understanding of ways to be more active and effective learners.

Specifically, in McCrindle and Christensen's (1995) experiment, students recorded reflections in their journals concerning the content and process of how they were learning in their biology course. A control group took the course without using the journals. The group who completed the journaling process showed significantly more sophisticated conceptions of learning than the control group, reported higher metacognitive strategy use, developed more complex and abstract knowledge structures, showed more control of their learning process, and had superior learning outcomes than the control group in terms of structuring of their knowledge and performance on the final exam (McCrindle & Christensen, 1995). Journals, when used to help students, deliberately reflect on the learning process and can transform their views and beliefs about the nature of learning, leading to a deeper level of comprehension, analysis, and interpretation.

Students who utilized guided journals in teacher education programs demonstrated personal growth through an increased awareness of at-risk populations,

clarification of personal experiences, clarification of professional experiences, and exploration and elucidation of personal knowledge and values. Students' also showed growth in guided journals through exploration of issues within education, increased insight into social issues, and application of personal values on future decisions (Black, Sileo, & Prater, 2000).

Dart, Boulton-Lewis, Brownlee, & McCrindle (1998) found journals useful in exposing students' understanding and reflection of theory; perceptions of the structure, style, and assessments of a subject; the connection of theory to practice; and level of development as learners and teachers within a teacher education course. The same researchers also discovered by engaging students in tasks of self-exploration, students reflected on their learning process, monitored goals, monitored teaching strategies, analyzed learning , and interrelated ideas to facilitate understanding and meaning.

Utilizing journaling as a learning tool allows educators to observe both personal and professional development of their students. Instructors are also able to stimulate and promote higher levels of student learning through providing written comments designed to facilitate deeper exploration and further thought (Garmon, 1998; Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Through journaling, students are able to theorize, reflect, question, and evaluate themselves, theory, and their environment in order to grow as people and future professionals. Educators have discovered that structuring journal questions promotes student learning because they actively reorganize and reconstruct their own knowledge through the integration of course content, self-knowledge, and practical experience Dart et al., 1998; Garmon, 1998; Stickel & Waltman, 1994). A sample of the courses in which journals have been found to promote and deepen student learning

includes school counseling practicum, social psychology, multicultural teacher education, teacher education of at-risk students, statistics, biology, and English (Black et al., 2000; Boud, 2001; Dart et al., 1998; Garmon, 1998; Miller, 1997; Sgoutas-Emch & Johnson, 1998; Stickel & Waltman, 1994).

In transitioning from a focus on the learning benefits to the mental health benefits of journaling, research conducted by Sgoutas-Emch and Johnson (1998) found that undergraduates in statistics who participated in journaling exercises throughout the course showed improved grades, lower anxiety before exams, and lower physiological reactions. These students recorded their feelings towards and experiences with the course and its content. Simply recording their feelings led to a large difference in test scores between the journaling and control group. On average, there was a 7.5 point increase over time for the journaling group, while the control group stayed at the same performance level. Sgoutas-Emch and Johnson (1998) speculated that the cognitive processes involved in journal keeping aided the students in moving to a deeper understanding of the statistics and helped alleviate some of their anxiety and fears. Reorganizing and revisiting information learned both in and out of the classroom using the journal helped clarify the subject matter. Journaling has been shown to be an effective tool to increase and enhance students' learning process, leading to more advanced metacognitive processes, higher test scores, deeper learning experiences, and reduced anxiety and stress before tests.

### *Journaling as a Therapeutic Tool*

Writing techniques are not new to the therapeutic community. From Ira Progoff's (1975) psychic healing and Pennebaker's (1997) pioneering success with writing

interventions, we arrive to present day uses of journaling that positively impact mental and physical health. *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being* (Lepore & Smyth, 2002) offers an in-depth exploration of current medical and therapeutic results positively associated with journaling and other expressive writing. Since mental health issues often accompany physical health issues, examining the avenue by which journaling positively impacts both physical and mental health is beneficial. Stone (1998) encourages therapists to utilize journaling in a variety of ways to improve therapeutic practice, while Lepore and Smyth (2002) cite several researchers whose work demonstrates the positive impact different forms of journaling have on helping to regulate high blood pressure, helping patients deal with the cancer experience, promoting positive social-emotional development in children, enhancing psychological and physical health, regulating extreme emotional responses, identifying and achieving goals, battling depression, increasing cognitive functioning, expanding working memory, and improving immune system functioning.

Journaling can be a useful therapeutic tool for school counselors to use in order to motivate growth for students by identifying and focusing on issues relevant to their healthy functioning. L'Abate (2001) identified numerous ways journaling can serve in the therapeutic process. These include: (a) an avenue for developing coping strategies by teaching respondents how to solve problems together with others and on their own, without the direct presence of a professional; (b) a means of promoting self-growth whereby homework assignments may enlarge the awareness of respondents without having to rely solely on the professional's time and energy; (c) a process synergistic and/or isomorphic with face-to-face talk sessions; (d) a way of linking evaluation with



treatment in ways either expensive or very difficult to achieve through talk; (e) preparation for face-to-face, verbal interventions, whereby written homework assignments teach respondents how to answer questions that allow for individual, dyadic, and family feedback under controlled conditions; (f) a way of assessing motivation for change and assumption of personal responsibility because it is difficult in writing to blame others, especially if the homework assignment is designed for the individual; (g) a tool to use after an intervention is terminated; (h) a means to provide respondents with something concrete to do about their problems above and beyond face-to-face talk sessions; (i) the impetus for carrying face-to-face, talk-based therapy session themes further and deeper; (j) a structure and focus when problem(s) need to be broken down into more manageable parts; (k) an avenue for increasing the sense of direction (and generalization) in treatment from the professional's office to the home; (l) a way to increase respondents' sense of responsibility for their own progress in treatment. (m) a means for increasing choices available to professionals as well as to respondents; (n) a tool for promoting awareness and critical evaluation of set beliefs, cognitions, and behavioral patterns with a greater sense of choice about them; (o) an avenue for maximizing effectiveness of interventions while saving time in clinical practice; (p) a way to conserve energy and effort by maximizing respondents' involvement in the treatment process (p. 12-13, 22).

In summary, journaling has been shown to be a vital part of both psychological and physical health programs to improve patient health. Specifically, journaling as a counseling tool encourages clients to explore, investigate, work through, and process

internal and external problems, leading to mental and emotional reorganization and a changed perception of problems and their solutions.

In addition to the numerous positive mental and physical improvements reported above, Youga (1995) details numerous other ways journaling has improved client's mental health. Some of these uses include focusing the client's attention on the problem, giving structure to problem solving or task completion, exploring possible solutions, clarifying directives, monitoring progress, sending messages to absent family members, improving abilities and self-confidence, as a means of self-expression, as a method of working through the significance of internal and external events, and as an avenue through which to make sense of a chaotic world. Youga (1995) reports specific counseling and therapeutic strategies that use journaling within the process, such as solution focused brief therapy, couple therapy, family therapy, group therapy, and one-on-one client work. Examples of specific disorders that have been treated using journaling in the counseling or therapeutic process include: insomnia, posttraumatic headaches, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, sexual abuse, smoking cessation, and eating disorders (Smyth & L'Abate, 2001; Youga, 1995).

#### Implications for School Counselors

Journaling is flexible and is limited only by the creativity of the counselor. School counselors can utilize traditional paper-and-pencil interventions or online interventions. Imagine an environment in which the student could use a voice recorder to record their journaling response and email it to their school counselor. A student could draw pictures online and send them as attachments to their school counselor. A student could capture creative responses as video journaling entries. Students' artistic, oral, and written

expression could be captured by using online technology and sent as a journal responses or submissions to the school counselor. The technology is currently available to make all these journaling communications possible. Only the school counselors' desire to learn new technologies limits their ability to creatively capture their students' non-traditional journaling responses and submissions. It is realistic to imagine students embracing these alternative ways to express themselves, e.g., the proliferation of web journals (blogs) on the Internet.

Online journaling allows school counselors to connect with many students with minimum contact hours. A school counselor can reach whole grade levels with specific counseling prompts and questions. These prompts can be delivered with video streaming; flash, online cartoons, online drawings, written prompts, recorded verbal prompts, or any other creative medium the counselor can think of. Setting up assorted electronic response options for students would allow the school counselor to give classroom guidance lessons ending in journaling prompts which require students to respond in some way. The journaling prompts could also be contained on the school counselor's web page, and the students could have the option of responding by typing their responses, using software to create artistic online drawings and other pictures, submit voice recordings, videos, or other creative expressions of their feelings. Imagine a school counselor setting up classroom guidance for specific issues for whole grades and being able to peruse the responses and critique them for students who may need further follow up in dealing with counseling issues, such as depression, aggression, anger, grief, or other issues.

Using traditional paper and pencil journaling or creative online journaling, school counselors can utilize unstructured or structured journaling to help students process their anxiety before End-of-Grade or End-of-Course testing, using one example. Journaling can also be given as a homework assignment, given as a whole class assignment, done in small groups, or even in one-on-one counseling sessions. Unstructured journaling can be utilized with only a single prompt, such as, "Write for the next twenty minutes about anything you want." Or, journaling can be given direction, with prompts such as, "Write me a letter about how you are feeling about the End-of-Grade examination next week." Or, "Write someone a letter sharing how you felt when you were shouting at each other on the playground." Using technology, you could have the student record their feelings into a digital voice recorder, upload the narration onto a computer and have the student use software to draw pictures of how they felt during the conflict as a background to their narration. Journaling is very simple and easy to use. There is minimal physical set-up needed for traditional paper and pencil format, and the creative ideas listed above for utilizing online journaling can be implemented with software that is most likely already downloaded on school computers.

Journaling uses in school counseling are limitless. School counselors could collaborate with classroom teachers to give school classroom guidance utilizing journaling to cover social issues, to teach students about expressing their feelings, to explore feelings during conflicts, to explore feelings after a loss or after a great achievement. Students could use journaling to explore their feelings about when they are at home alone, when they are scared, when they are safe at school, or even to explore their relationship with their teachers and counselors. School counselors could

also utilize journaling to assess how the student feels about the interventions they are implementing together. The myriad benefits of journaling are extensive, as mentioned above, and result in a process of self-exploration that is beneficial to all students, whether in elementary, middle or high school.

### Ethical Considerations

When a teacher/counselor begins using online journaling, new ethical considerations develop. First, downloading email encryption programs to ensure confidentiality within emails is encouraged. One can find information about automatic encryption software online, for example, the company Verisign offers complete encryption software for the individual or company (see <http://www.verisign.com/>). For example, a school could apply for a grant to purchase digital ids for their email and journaling interaction. Second, passwords and encryption for all course web sites, NetMeeting sites, and other online journaling tools are also highly recommended. Third, teachers/counselors should educate themselves and their students/clients about the possible confidentiality risks when using online course web sites or email to communicate. The easy way to remember the risk online is to remember that unless it is encrypted, others can read it. All other ethical considerations and limitations are consistent with those set forth in the boards of the American Psychological Association (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/stmnt01/html>) and the American Counseling Association (<http://www.counseling.org/resources/internet.htm> (Kraus, Zack, & Stricker, 2004)). Students and counselors utilizing the internet to engage in journaling should ensure their interactions are encrypted. In addition, school counselors should create disclosure

forms explaining the risks to students, teachers, and parents before engaging in online communication of any sort.

When utilizing journaling assignments, school counselors should look for themes, as journaling is another form in which student's express themselves. The evaluation of journaling is the same as the evaluation of verbal interactions in one-on-one or group counseling. School counselors should be aware of distinctive phrases, such as "I want to hurt myself," or "There is really no reason to keep going," to name a couple drastic signals. Students express themselves through journaling in a remarkably similar way to verbal expressions. Often, however, journaling allows for self-exploration and a release of deeper feelings and thoughts, giving insight to the counselor as to how to best proceed in following up with the student immediately, or in the next group or individual counseling session. Confidentiality of journaling should be given the same rights and limitations as verbal interaction. School counselors should clearly explain and disclose these rights and limitations before starting counseling with any student.

### Conclusion

Journaling has been shown to have diverse therapeutic and educational benefits. School counselors have an opportunity to utilize the benefits of journaling to strengthen and deepen the therapeutic experiences of their students. The flexibility of journaling allows for it to be used in a myriad of forms, including digital, paper and pencil, whole class, small group, or in one-on-one counseling sessions. The possible uses of digital and paper and pencil journaling are limited only by the creativity of the school counselor. Evaluation of journaling is remarkably similar to the evaluation process used in verbal interaction with students in class, small group or individual counseling

environments. Other examples of uses of journaling include the opportunity they present for school counselors to collaborate with classroom teachers, using it to alleviate stress before End-of-Grade testing, or as a self-exploration tool to express feelings and thoughts about student and teacher relationship.

Journaling is a relatively untapped educational and therapeutic tool. School counselors should take advantage of the creative medium of the Internet to deliver online journaling effectively and efficiently, therefore delivering services to more students with less paperwork, time and effort. The cognitive and non-cognitive rewards of journaling impact both physiological and mental health and can be used across a broad range of school settings. The flexibility and applicability of journaling within diverse contexts allows the use of journaling to facilitate educational and therapeutic change within students at varying developmental and educational levels. Journaling's flexibility, its potential for student creativity and its ability to deliver counseling services to large populations make it a powerful school counseling tool. Journaling's ability to positively affect metacognitive processes, reduce anxiety and stress, enable self-exploration and healing, promote therapeutic change and be an adjunct to therapy and teaching makes it an invaluable tool.

Future outcome-based school counseling research should also focus on the process of utilizing journaling as an intervention in order to evaluate its effectiveness with different school counseling issues, in different settings or environments, and to demonstrate accountability. Is structured journaling more beneficial for certain students while informal journaling more useful for others? What makes an effective journal prompt, assignment, or structure which leads to therapeutic change? Under what

circumstances is online journaling effective within school counseling? Are there potential concerns or disadvantages of using journaling as a school counseling tool? Since journaling is effective as an educational tool in higher education, can it be combined within the same course to promote non-cognitive growth? What are some examples of the untouched potential of the Internet when delivering journaling services? What are the long term benefits of expressive writing when compared to traditional face to face counseling (L'Abate, 2001)? Finally, are there cultural implications or considerations inherent in journaling?



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