

History of the Association for Creativity in Counseling: The Evolution of a Conference, Division, and Journal

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ABSTRACT. The Association for Creativity in Counseling (ACC), though granted status as the 19th division of the American Counseling Association only three years ago, is rich with history. This article takes the reader through the evolution of ACC and its official journal: *The Journal of Creativity in Mental Health (JCMH)*. The ACC and the *JCMH* are committed to promoting the values of diversity, creativity, and relational development. Goals include providing a forum for counselors and other mental health professionals to forge growth-fostering relationships and form positive connections. This historical account is a tribute to all those involved in making ACC a reality. It provides interesting and valuable information for anyone interested in ACC or in forming an association. doi:10.1300/J456v02n03_06 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://

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The academic year was 2003-2004. The setting was a musky, old warehouse situated on a picturesque, hill country campus in central Texas. The counseling faculty had been reassigned to this building while the Education Building was being renovated. Such reassignments are rarely ideal, but this particular move was especially challenging for faculty and students of the counseling program. Not only did the roof leak, the air conditioner malfunction, and the cubicles loudly echo in the temporary building, it was located away from everything that had been familiar. Two of the eight program faculty members were on developmental leave and another faculty member went on maternity leave soon thereafter. The program's longtime Department Chair had assumed a position as Graduate Dean at a university across the country the year before; and even the department's esteemed administrative assistant was housed in another building. This was truly a time of transition.

The Pecos Building, temporary quarters for the counseling program, had facilities for one classroom, so most of the counseling classes were held in other buildings throughout campus that year. The setting was in stark contrast to the Education Building, which had provided a hub or place of meeting for many students and faculty. Given the lack of physical proximity to other faculty and the standard resources, the challenge to maintain and enjoy the usual communication, connection, and good hearted commotion was formidable.

Such disruption can, no doubt, challenge the morale and working order in many institutions. Some would say that the move provided a less than ideal setting to stimulate creativity or promote resourceful action. Still, it was in this setting and under these circumstances that some valuable, creative connections were fostered among students and faculty and that much of the legwork involved in forming the *Association for Creativity in Counseling* (ACC) took place.

I (Thelma) served as Counseling Program Coordinator at the time and had chaired and organized the *Creativity in Psychotherapy Conferences* at the university for several years. The conferences seemed to meet an important need for professionals in the area. Their enthusiasm gave fuel to the idea of expanding the scope of our creative forums to in-

clude a journal publication and national participation through our professional organization, The American Counseling Association (ACA).

The dream of forming the Association for Creativity in Counseling had been long-coming. It involved creating a home-base for counselors and other mental health professionals within ACA whose professional focus included creative, diverse, and relational approaches to counseling. As a group, we were also committed to promoting the values of diversity, inclusivity, and relational development. In that spirit, several of the committee members who were psychologists and not current members of ACA, joined ACA to promote the vision of unity and collaboration among mental health professionals.

At the same time, we clearly wanted to assume and support a strong counselor identity within our proposed association. The group met a number of times before deciding on an association name and agreed on the *Association for Creativity in Counseling*. The group also worked diligently to meet the demands of this formidable endeavor.

A mission for the association was that counselors, counselor educators, and counselors in training who shared an interest in creative and innovative therapies would gather to learn from and grow with one another. Our enthusiasm was fueled by the excitement expressed by participants at our creativity conferences.

This effort was designed to create a forum where counselors and counselor educators could come together to celebrate their passion for the creative; a division where music, the media, art, theater, storytelling, and other creative processes could be explored in the service of increasing self-awareness, meaning-making, relational capacities, and conscious change.

Members of the committee who joined us in this project were: Drs. JoLynne Reynolds, Colleen Connolly, Drema Albin, and Christopher Brown. The department awarded JoLynne Reynolds a course release so she could begin securing e-mail addresses of ACA members and start the process of hand typing invitations to prospective members. Colleen Connolly made inquiries into the process involved in becoming a national division and provided context to questions fielded by the committee. I (Stella) initiated the process of writing bylaws for the proposed division and worked with the committee to clarify the bylaws efforts. And I (Thelma) enlisted and organized faculty, student, and administrative support, made phone calls, typed e-mail invitations, and responded to many interested members. Madelyn, my 18 year old daughter, helped type invitations to members during her Christmas break, and my father, who was visiting, cheered us on.

Richard Simmons, a philosophy undergraduate student who also served as webmaster, was a tremendous resource for the committee. He spent many hours in the Pecos Building supporting the canvas. Other

graduate students also provided wonderful support. Gene Ashlock was especially supportive and even recruited his wife to help. Victoria Wing, Anne Ghering, Misty Mathis, Jodi Elder, Crystal Blanchard, and other students also helped contact ACA members.

One Friday evening in December, 2003, Richard and I (Thelma) sent electronic invitations to ACA members across the country. Minutes later, we began to receive the first of the over 700 responses that would come in support of ACC. Later, JoLynne Reynolds helped compile the data into a bound notebook to be sent to ACA headquarters. I (Stella) worked on the bylaws draft, while the committee read, reviewed, and revised the information. Soon thereafter we sent the entire application by registered mail to Carol Neiman at ACA headquarters. The effort was synergistic and exceedingly collaborative. It was not long before our dream began to look like it could become a reality.

In April of 2004, after many months of canvassing phone calls, requesting support, and typing e-mail invitations to ACA members, the *Association for Creativity in Counseling* was granted status as an Organizational Affiliate.

We first heard about ACC's approved status at the Kansas City convention when I (Thelma) saw Dr. Sam Gladding, who was President-Elect of the American Counseling Association, walk across the convention hall. With hope and some anxiety, I introduced myself to Dr. Gladding and asked him if he could tell me what the Governing Council vote had been regarding ACC's petition. I'll never forget the warm smile that crossed Sam's face. He congratulated me as he told me that the Governing Council had voted to accept ACC's petition for Organizational Affiliate status. What an exciting moment! And what a warm welcome! I could barely wait to call everyone—everyone had worked so hard. And to be told by Sam, who is such an inspiration as a counselor and voice for creativity; it was simply wonderful!

Five months later, on September 10, 2004, ACC received status as ACA's newest division. ACC celebrated its inaugural launch at the American Counseling Association convention held in Atlanta. Under Sam Gladding's helm, the convention was entitled *Counseling: A Creative Force in the Fabric of Life*.

ACC LEADERSHIP

The founding committee that proposed the successful launching of a creativity division within ACA included: Thelma Duffey, Chair; Stella Kerl McClain; JoLynne Reynolds; Colleen Connolly; Drema Albin;

and Christopher Brown. This committee worked diligently to meet the requirements for consideration as set forth by The Governing Council of The American Counseling Association. When it came time to organize the official board of directors, several of the steering committee members assumed leadership roles. I (Thelma) agreed to serve as founding President; Drema Albin accepted the position of Treasurer; JoLynne Reynolds assumed the role of Trustee/Historian; and I (Stella) assumed the role of Trustee/Bylaws Chair.

The committee also invited other ACA members who had not been part of the original steering committee into the founding board. Dr. Marcheta Evans was invited to serve as President-elect; Dr. Albert Valadez to serve as ACC's Secretary; and Dr. Dana Comstock, who had participated in the creativity conferences since its inception, to serve as Trustee/Research Chair. Dr. Shane Haberstroh was asked to serve as Media/Technology Chair and Drs. Simone Lambert and Heather Trepal were asked to serve as Co-Membership Chairs. Given the important role that the Governing Council representative plays within ACA, and given the spirit of collaboration with creative arts therapists that we hoped to foster, the committee invited Cathy Malchiodi, active leader in the American Art Therapy Association, to assume this role on our board. Cathy later resigned from her position with ACC after accepting a professional position that would conflict with her ACC service efforts. Dr. Heather Trepal subsequently assumed the Governing Council role.

ACC VISIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The steering committee that worked toward establishing ACC as a division within ACA had very specific hopes for the ACC membership. These were reflected in the words used in the association name. The committee intently chose to use the word "creativity" because it is a broad term that encourages diversity in its membership. It chose the word "counseling" because it reflects the association's professional identity and promotes the efforts of our professional organization. More specifically, the committee hoped the membership would include counselors and other mental health professionals working from a wide range of professional perspectives that value creative, relational, and complementary therapies. We anticipated that members would forge growth-fostering relationships and form positive connections through this forum. Our vision was to be inclusive; this vision remains strong.

ACC members include mental health and community agency counselors, private practitioners, counselor educators, school counselors, students, retired counselors, psychologists, and professionals new to the counseling field. Some ACC members also hold licensure/certification in the creative arts, including art, music, play, and dance, or other advanced specialties in creative and complementary therapies such as EMDR, hypnosis, and TFT, to name a few.

A CREATIVITY CONFERENCE IN PROCESS

One benefit that the ACC leadership initiated on behalf of its membership was structuring ACC's collaboration with the already existing *Dr. Lesley Jones Creativity in Psychotherapy Conference*. Our vision was that the conference, which had established roots in Texas, could serve the membership of ACC.

The conference history is an interesting one. A small, creative arts conference was held at the Texas State campus in 1997. When Dr. Joyce Kutcher, the professor responsible for organizing the conference left the university that year, I (Thelma) assumed responsibility for organizing a similar, but more diverse effort the following year. With a limited budget, we recruited members of the faculty to participate in the conference planning and together we defined the scope of the new conference. Members of this committee included Drs. Lesley Jones, John Garcia, Colleen Connolly, Stella Kerl, JoLynne Reynolds, Christopher Brown, and Drema Albin. In 2001, the conference was renamed in memory of Dr. Lesley Jones, beloved and enthusiastic colleague, mentor, and friend.

A JOURNAL'S BIRTH

Prior to establishing the division, and with the conference serving as a catalyst, John Garcia and I (Thelma) investigated ways of founding a creativity-focused journal. We discussed creating a journal that would serve as a consolidated reference source for academicians and clinicians, while promoting standards of practice for professionals using creative, diverse, and relational approaches in counseling, psychotherapy, and mental health practice. We were granted seed money and assigned a graduate assistant to help create proposals and contact pub-

lishers. We then began the long and involved process of founding a scholarly journal.

Soon thereafter, we began negotiations with The Haworth Press, Inc., a leading publisher of scholarly and professional books and journals. We discussed at length the scope and possible titles for the proposed journal. We also discussed our desire for the journal to include themes of inclusivity and diversity, while engendering a spirit of connection and collaboration within the field of counseling and psychotherapy.

A specific journal goal was to represent the creative endeavors of diverse mental health professionals, including counselors, psychologists, social workers, expressive therapists, school counselors, psychoanalysts, and others. After some discussion, the journal title was decided: *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. John serves on the *JCMH* Editorial Board and I serve as Founding Editor. The journal debuted in the Spring of 2006.

**ACC:
THE 19TH DIVISION
OF THE AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION**

The Association for Creativity in Counseling is now proudly a national division within an esteemed and established body of professionals. In addition, the *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* is the official journal for the *Association for Creativity in Counseling*. Consistent with the spirit first engendered in our early conference discussions, and consistent with the writings and leadership of Sam Gladding on creativity in counseling, the goals for the association, conference, and the journal are to provide a place of dialogue and an opportunity for colleagues interested in using innovative and creative mediums within clinical practice to share, learn, and grow with each other.

No doubt, ACC's history reflects a vision, a mission, and a tenacity that fosters innovative action in the service of facilitating deepened awareness and growth-fostering connections. The charter organizers purport that it is only with that spirit in mind that ACC can best prosper and that the ACC mission can reach its greatest heights.

THE FIRST YEAR

Our goals for the first year were to create an infrastructure for the association and begin the process of establishing relationships with our

ACC colleagues. For several months, we worked closely with Rich Yep and the ACA staff to bring ACC into the mainstream of ACA communication and literature. The task involved including ACC in existing brochures, literature, and the website. We also worked with the Member Services Representatives to provide easy access for members who wanted to learn about and join ACC. Rich Yep, Carol Neiman, Mary Janicke, and Jacki Walker supported these efforts. I (Thelma) also communicated regularly with Mary Griffith, who provided helpful statistics and membership information. Fredericka Baker served as division liaison and was available for mentoring.

Within the first month of our charter, ACC established its own website. I (Thelma) began the process by perusing other websites and collecting information that could be useful for members; organized information related to bylaws, goals, conferences, resources, and the journal. We downloaded pictures from our creativity conferences and included them as a historical frame for this work. We also solicited help from creative art therapists so we could accurately include these professional resources and information for our membership. Another immediate goal was to provide a contact person for membership needs. Simone Lambert served as Membership Chair.

One month after its inception, the leadership met to discuss how we could best serve the ACC membership. Shane Haberstroh agreed to serve as Media Chair and Webmaster. With advancements in technology, we wanted to create a user-friendly mode of communication that would provide members with creative resources and member information. Shane assumed responsibility for sending blast e-mails to the membership and members were invited to send any inquiries about postings his way. Heather Trepal agreed to serve as Co-Membership Chair and created welcoming letters that would be sent out to new members. In these letters we invited member participation and contact information for existing committees.

Albert Valadez, as ACC Secretary, agreed to spearhead the newsletter process, and JoLynne Reynolds agreed to serve as Historian. Dana Comstock agreed to lead the Research/Interest Network committee and I (Stella) maintained my role as Bylaws Committee chair. I (Thelma) agreed to continue my role as chair of the Creativity Conference that was scheduled for February and Cathy Malchiodi agreed to look into holding a Silent Auction at the upcoming ACA convention. The plan was in place and ACC had much to look forward to.

Four months later, ACC successfully co-sponsored the Dr. Lesley Jones Creativity in Psychotherapy Conference with The University of Texas at San Antonio and Texas State University. St. Mary's University

sponsored the Welcoming Reception at Oak Hills Country Club and the pre-conference workshop featuring Amy Banks, MD Ed Jacobs, PhD, invested in ACC's launch by contributing to its pre-conference program. Over 350 participants attended.

One month later, the ACC board disseminated its first newsletter, held a Town Hall meeting at the ACA Convention in Atlanta, and met with ACC members across the country to discuss the history of ACC and its future direction. ACC also provided a booth for member information and communication and hosted a well-attended reception in Atlanta. The year was a fruitful, albeit, busy one for ACC.

THE SECOND YEAR

One month after we began this term, tragedy struck our country. Hurricane Katrina brought destruction and carnage to New Orleans and the surrounding area. A number of ACC Board members joined in relief efforts and encouraged ACC members throughout the country to contribute their time and professional gifts toward this worthy cause. No doubt, this emergency took precedence over other logistical goals that the leadership had in place and consumed the minds and hearts of all those who witnessed such pervasive grief.

We included information on Katrina on our website and soon thereafter began the process of updating the website, consistent to plan. Accordingly, Dana Comstock and her committee disseminated a survey on member interest and posted a list of practitioners who were willing to add their names to the ACC counselor contact list. Heather Trepal and her committee created membership certificates. I (Thelma) began to compile a Procedures Manual for the leadership, wrote a series of ACC related news items for *Counseling Today*, and worked with ACA staff on membership needs as they arose.

JCMH was officially launched in April of 2006 and we published four issues of the journal. Additionally, ACC hosted a number of activities at the ACA convention in Montreal during March 30-April 5, including a board meeting, business meeting, booth participation, and a reception co-hosted with the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES).

THE THIRD YEAR

ACC participated in the ACA convention in a number of ways. Marcheta Evans led the Business Meeting, Gwen Loudon-Gerber orga-

nized the ACC booth staffing, and ACC co-sponsored a reception with ACES. The ACC Executive Board collaborated on a presentation featuring various creative modalities, and sponsored a series of ACC related sessions. Additionally, the Journal of Creativity in Mental Health published and disseminated four separate issues, including one featuring graduate student scholarship, and a double issue focusing on diverse forms of grief and loss counseling. The double issue was also published as a book entitled *Creative Interventions in Grief and Loss Therapy: When the Music Stops, a Dream Dies*, edited by Thelma Duffey (2005). It remains our hope that the journal will be a valuable resource to its readership by providing you with cutting-edge, creative clinical interventions and research findings.

THE NEXT STEP

Our next step in the association's development is to create competencies in creativity, diversity, and relational development. We will update you on these plans and solicit your input as we move forward. I (Stella) am excited to be part of this dynamic effort. I (Thelma), too, am so pleased to be part of ACC's development. As I look back at our vision for ACC, and as we look toward the future, one point remains clear: Creativity is for everyone and can be accessed by anyone. At its best, it is used in the service of the greater good. In particular, shared creativity engenders an affirming spirit, promotes resourcefulness, and illustrates how collective energies, because of our diverse range of gifts, can be ignited and enjoyed. We invite you to join us as ACC takes its next step in identifying relational competencies and fostering creativity in service of its mission.

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