the lay of the land

a reflection from internship

I was recently introduced to an art therapy technique that may be old hat, but was new to me. It is called a feelings map. Students are asked to write down all the feelings they have experienced in the last day (week, month, etc). It might be helpful to provide a list of feelings words with pictures that is age appropriate for the artist. Then the student chooses a color to correspond to each feeling listed, thus creating a key for the map.

Next, the student takes some time to create a map of their feelings using the colors from their key. The student should be instructed to draw a small amount of color for a feeling they have not experienced much, and color a lot of the colors that they have felt more often. Stress that there is no "right way" to do this, they don't have to use all the colors, and that everyone's map will come out differently. The fewer directions given, and examples shown, the better! Allow the student to color in silence, unless s/he initiates conversation.

After the student indicates that the map is done, invite him/ her to share the different parts of the map. Some students choose to name different parts, while others will tell a story. A few students may choose not to share at all. Allow the student to lead the direction of the conversation.

I have found this activity to be incredibly therapeutic for the child, but it also provides some insights for the counselor. I discovered that creating one for myself helped me to better articulate how I feel, and knowing oneself is an essential skill for counselors! Give it a try... you may find it helpful, too.