

Groupwork course experiences: An alternate pedagogical approach

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Abstract: Numerous concerns exist in the groupwork and counseling literatures regarding the requirement that students participate in experiential counseling groups as part of their academic coursework. This research examined the use of service learning task groups as an alternate way to address this required component of group counseling coursework to address multiple relationship concerns between faculty and students. Results indicated that while many group counseling skills were demonstrated in the task group, not all skills manifested. Group skills that were more 'safe' in terms of counselor risk were demonstrated more often. Less 'safe' or risky group skills for the counselor, such as providing feedback to a group member, were demonstrated less frequently. The authors offer implications for research and practice.

Keywords: Group counseling, Multiple Relationships, Service Learning, Task Groups, Pedagogy, Counselor Training, Groupwork

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The following paper draws on American experience in discussing a groupwork programme offered to counseling students on a university course.

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2009) accreditation body requires that all counselors-in-training are instructed and exposed to counseling groups as part of their professional training. These standards reflect the Professional Standards for the Training of Groupworkers, a policy document of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW; 2000), which requires counseling students to participate in a minimum of 10 hours of groupwork as part of groupwork training. Historically, these hours have consisted of experiential counseling groups during one's groupwork course in which students participate as group members and often have the opportunity to lead the group.

From the time that this experiential groupwork condition was included in counseling curricula, a number of concerns have emerged in the literature about the practice of this requirement (Davenport, 2004; Fall & Levitov, 2002; Goodrich, 2008). One such worry has centered on multiple relationships between students, and between students and the course instructors (Goodrich, 2008). Another concern centers on the pedagogical methods used to teach students group concepts and effective group facilitation skills applicable across different types of group including counseling, psychotherapy, psychoeducational and task groups (ASGW, 2000). This article focuses on how instructors teaching groupwork can minimize the ethical concerns related to multiple relationships by using a pedagogical approach to maximize counseling students' learning of relevant group concepts and group leadership skills.

Groupwork skills Development

Earlier research (Conyne, Wilson, Kline, Morran, & Ward, 1993) reported that competence in groupwork skills was addressed in less than three-quarters of counselor preparation programs, with sparse reporting occurring since (Goodrich, 2008). To establish common practices across graduate programs, ASGW (2000) developed standards regarding core group skills that entry-level counselors were expected to

master. While the standards provide clear guidelines for skills training outcomes, empirical data on effective training methods for developing group skills are sparse (Goodrich, 2008). As a result, how to teach these core skills is largely at the discretion of the program and individual faculty members.

The conceptual literature on groupwork suggests that group training should utilize a combination of didactic instruction, observation, participation in experiential groups, and supervised practice in group facilitation (Barlow, 2004; Stockton & Toth, 1996). The approaches are interconnected such that observation, experiential learning, and practice reinforce each other and enhance students' grasp of the didactic material on group dynamics and theory (Riva & Korinek, 2004). Akos, Goodnough, and Milsom (2004), and Anderson and Price (2001) reported the most common approach to teaching groupwork skills in counseling programs was in the form of experiential groups. Experiential groups offer opportunities to learn both on an emotional and behavioral level, which can be meaningfully connected with group concepts learned at an intellectual level (Riva & Korinek, 2004). Barlow (2004) stated that experiential groups are one of the most complicated groups because students 'must master a number of tasks as they are experiencing group forces' (p. 117). Most importantly, she concluded that professors 'need to strategically layer when, where, and how they learn these complex skills' (p. 124).

In addition to experiential learning, vicarious learning of group skills occurs through observation. Observation allows students to watch how an experienced group facilitator uses group skills in a given context and the group process at work (Barlow, 2004). Through survey research, Hall et al (1999) found support for vicarious learning of skills, where observing and focusing on a skill improved other skills when applied to group counseling. Hall and his colleagues concluded 'the pattern of being stimulated and disturbed may be regarded as the optimal conditions for learning to take place in any environment' (p. 109), referring to this imbalance.. Orr and Hulse-Killacky (2006) advocated that voice, meaning, and transfer of learning be incorporated into teaching groupwork as a way to model group skills during teaching as well as minimizing student concerns. To enhance skills development through vicarious observation, Osborn, Daninhirsch, and Page (2003) called for the use of the fishbowl approach (described in more detail

below), and they emphasized the importance of immediate peer and instructor feedback.

Multiple relationships

As seen above, groupwork instructors have been asked to use a variety of techniques to teach counselors-in-training groupwork competencies as skills. Many of these techniques historically used, however, involve the instructor in taking an active role in the students' learning, and encourages the use of counseling groups as part of a students' training experience. In this way, students are expected to share personal information while an instructor is in the room facilitating or monitoring the counseling group. This is counterbalanced by standards set by ASGW (2000) and CACREP (2009) that state that professors cannot allow information about a student's personal life to influence the student's grade, but also must serve as gatekeepers for the profession of counseling. Academic programs training counselors in groupwork are left in a position of balancing training standards, professional ethics, and the reality of limited options (Goodrich & Luke, 2012; Goodrich & Shin, 2013). One of the primary concerns is the potential for multiple relationships to occur during experiential group counseling (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005). Throughout this article, we will use the term multiple relationships to reflect the current terminology and understanding of relationships faculty and students engage in during a counseling training program (Scarborough, Bernard, & Morris, 2006).

Anderson and Price (2001) found that approximately one-third of the counseling students they surveyed reported feelings of discomfort around privacy issues and multiple relationships in their groupwork classes. They reported that some students felt their privacy was invaded, leaving them feeling vulnerable. Because the group members also are peers, some students may fear the repercussions of disclosing personal materials while engaged in the group (Goodrich & Luke, 2012). Further, if the participation in their experiential group is graded, students may feel coerced to disclose private information, leading to potential ethical concerns. On the other hand, experiencing an appropriate level of vulnerability in a group can enhance student understanding of real group dynamics and client vulnerability in their future group facilitation (Davenport, 2004; Goodrich, 2008).

Multiple relationships also can cause instructors to lose their objectivity. They may become torn between academic expectations and their personal reaction to a student. Between 1993 and 2001, Anderson and Price (2001) found a 36% decrease in instructors leading in-class experiential groups. The majority of participants in Anderson and Price's study reported their professors did not lead their groups, and approximately 33% reported their professors occasionally observed the groups. This was likely due to professors taking precautions to minimize student discomfort and in an attempt to address multiple relationship concerns. Similar research by Merta and his colleagues (Merta & Sission, 1991; Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993) described strategies and techniques groupwork instructors have utilized to address this pedagogical-ethical dilemma. When professors do not lead the experiential group, however, students miss out on the direct feedback from the course instructor and vicarious learning by observing the faculty expert at work leading a group.

Alternative pedagogical techniques

In an effort to address obligatory group participation, some group counseling courses utilize fishbowls with optional participation (Hensley, 2002; Kane, 1995; Osborn, Daninhirsch, & Page, 2003). A fishbowl is an activity in which students are divided into observers in an outer circle and group participants in an inner circle; only the participants share their personal materials in the group while the group participants rotate the leadership role and the instructor observes the group. Within this model, students often have the opportunity to participate, or to 'opt out' as an observer. The presence of the groupwork instructor using this pedagogical model ensures that students will have the potential to see and utilize groupwork skills as part of their involvement; however, group counseling fishbowls, while allowing students to maintain more privacy and feeling less vulnerable (because they can opt out), leave many students with insufficient opportunities to fulfill the 10-hour requirement as active group members.

One solution is to ensure that the course instructor is not a group leader. Some professors utilize doctoral students as facilitators to avoid potential multiple relationships (Davenport, 2004; Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, &

Young, 2009). Although the use of doctoral students may help preserve students' privacy, it still has the potential for ethical concerns between the doctoral and masters students (Goodrich, 2008; Haberstroh, Parr, Gee, & Trepal, 2006; Scarborough et al, 2006). For example, it may become problematic if doctoral students have a strong reaction to a student in group and then find themselves teaching the student in another course, providing clinical supervision to the student or taking the same course with the student (Goodrich & Luke, 2012). Personal information learned in the group classes could have a personal or traumatic impact on the doctoral students. Additionally, if the professor supervises the doctoral students leading the groups, the students taking the course, even if not named, may be identifiable to the professors based on presenting issues.

Other instructors have opted to utilize an outside licensed mental health professional to lead experiential counseling groups (Goodrich, 2008; Merta et al, 1993). This avoids many of the problems within the experiential group process, but finding someone to lead the groups can be difficult especially if financial compensation is required. Regardless of who leads the experiential group, research has shown that experiences that are challenging within a safe environment facilitate the student members' learning to address the multiple facets of group behavior (Hall et al, 1999). Therefore, it is important that instructors of groupwork create a facilitative learning environment while mitigating ethical concerns related to multiple relationships.

Complications in experiential training are not unique to group counseling, yet potential harm from experiential group has often been the focus of criticism (Davenport, 2004). Counseling skills courses (or pre-practicum), practical courses, and internships courses have similar issues surrounding students being expected to share personal information, yet literature on these courses and multiple relationships is scarce in comparison. Any course with self-exploration via term papers or other requirements also poses complications, including multiple relationships (ACA, 2005; CACREP, 2009). At the same time, faculty members are expected to monitor the personal fit of students with the profession and to protect the public from students who are not currently appropriate to work with clients (Goodrich & Luke, 2012; Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Homrich, 2009). Kottler (2004) encouraged the use of experiential groups in courses and challenged instructors to

overcome ethical concerns including multiple relationships, informed consent issues, and power abuse. Moreover, Hall et al (1999) suggest that students' learning of the skills and personal development can be strengthened via experiential group when ethical concerns are appropriately addressed.

Purpose of the study

As addressed above, all groupwork instructors have to balance the need to instruct students in groupwork concepts and skills to learn how to be effective group leaders, as well as be concerned about the potential for multiple relationships and feelings of safety for those students. This led the first author of this research to question whether skills observed in a fishbowl experiential counseling group could be vicariously learned and demonstrated in a task group. In this way, groupwork instructors would meet the training standards set by ASGW (2000) without hearing students' personal issues in a counseling group, thus addressing the ethical concern of multiple relationships and student safety.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate a pedagogical approach in groupwork that focused on minimizing the multiple relationship concerns while enhancing student learning of the group concepts and skills. Based on the reviewed literature as well as our professional experience, we analyzed the problems as follows: First, we argue that multiple relationships themselves are not the core problem. Completely eliminating multiple relationships in counselor training is impossible (Goodrich, 2008; Scarborough, Bernard, & Morse, 2006); instead, we believe that focusing on minimizing students' concerns regarding potential privacy invasion and power abuse stemming from multiple relationships, is more important and realistic. Because experiential groups focus on personal development and discussion of personal issues, they tend to accentuate students' concerns around privacy. In contrast, the focus of task groups is on a given task so that self disclosure on personal issues and consequential privacy concerns would be minimal compared to experiential groups. Given the literature suggesting that vicarious learning in a given type of group can be transferred to other types of group skills (Hall et al, 1999), we hypothesized that a combination of vicarious learning via fishbowl

activities and participation in task group activities would facilitate student group skills development with fewer privacy concerns. In this study, we used fishbowls and task groups as a means to teach group skills and concepts.

Community service was selected as the task for the task group component of the course. Community service done as part of one's academic curriculum has been defined in the field of higher education as 'service learning.' The idea of service learning is to combine academic instruction along with a related community service task. The goals of service learning were defined by The Community Service Act of 1990, which advocated the fostering of civic responsibility with students, and the related integration and enhancement of the academic curriculum, so that they can participate and learn about their communities, as well as have structured time for reflection about the service experience. As such, service learning helps students develop a greater awareness of social issues through didactic and experiential work, along with the skills to work in the larger systems present in the communities in which they live, work, and are educated. Moreover, it fits with universities' missions of community engagement (Conyne & Bemak, 2004; Conyne et al, 2008). That is, it models the community engagement and service we want our students to engage in as professionals upon graduation, and it meets community expectations that universities will engage in service. Thus, we believe that having a service-learning component in a groupwork class adds great value to student learning of group skills relevant to the community in which they will work in the future.

Research question

The community service task group activity was created to teach groupwork in a manner that avoids the ethical dilemmas associated with experiential groups yet facilitates students experiencing of group concepts. Therefore, the research question was: if counseling students were exposed to a teaching method that used a service-learning task group and fishbowl, would they still demonstrate the skills development required in professional counseling training standards (for example, ASGW, 2000; CACREP, 2009)?

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a counselor education program located within a research-focused university in the Southwest United States. Persons were eligible to participate if they were enrolled as a master's student in the counseling program and also registered in the introductory group counseling course; as such, a total of 37 students were eligible to participate in this study. Of these, 33 consented to participate in the research. Students who elected to participate anonymously wrote journals on four questions following each group meeting during the semester. Therefore, the course instructor did not know which students participated. As such, demographic information about participating students cannot be provided. The course, however, had a diverse group of students enrolled in community/agency, school, and dual degree (community/agency and school) counseling programs. The demographics of the course paralleled the demographics of the university's counselor education program, which is approximately half Hispanic, quarter Native American, and quarter European American/Caucasian.

Instrument

Given the complexity of issues that students encounter in experiential groups, a time of private reflection through journaling (writing journals) can be helpful in sorting out their personal experiences while relating these to the didactic material. Haberstroh et al (2006) utilized e-journaling with students to determine whether students would experience an increase in skills development as a result of journaling; the researchers found the e-journaling process to be successful. For example, the students reported that this method allowed them to complete unfinished business carried over from the group. As a result, cohesion was strengthened, as students were able to express their thoughts. Concurrently, the students reported that they were engaged in the group's experience throughout the week as a result of the journaling process. Additional findings showed positive effects in students' academic performance, understanding of group stages

(Tuckman 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), and increased learning of Yalom's therapeutic factors (Haberstroh et al, 2006). Finally, students' journals transitioned from superficial levels to greater depth over the course of the semester.

As journaling has been found to be helpful for students in connecting their personal experience with the didactic material (Haberstroh et al, 2006), we decided to utilize students' journals as our source of data. Students were asked to keep a journal for the duration of the semester; each weekly journal entry had the same four prompts: 1) what group process strengths did you observe? 2) what group process weaknesses did you observe? 3) what stage do you believe your group is in, and why? 4) what were your personal reactions to this meeting? In the last week only, students were also asked to respond to a fifth question: how did this task group experience help or hinder your knowledge of groupwork?

Procedures

At the beginning of the semester, students received informed consent information and details regarding the nature of the research, voluntary participation, lack of incentives and potential risks and benefits of participating in the study. This research took place across two semesters, with two separate groups of students participating in the project. Prior to the study's start, the researchers' institutional review board reviewed and approved the research. The first author was the course instructor of the introductory group course in a counselor education program. The course was designed to provide students with the initial training they needed to later co-facilitate task, psycho-educational (groups that have a teaching component and a processing component) and counseling groups. The course was presented from a systematic framework, with class sessions consisting of the presentation of key concepts and videos of group counseling sessions followed by in-depth discussion of what the students were learning and observing. After this, the class as a group processed how they were experiencing the material and course. The reported course experiences were then tied to group concepts by the course instructor (for example, initial group tension and ice-breakers, unspoken agendas, and the like). The next segment of each class was an optional participation group counseling fishbowl with processing.

Based on the historical literature and common pedagogy of the

field, a group counseling fishbowl, that allowed students the option of participating or opting out of the experience, was incorporated as the instruction model for the duration of the semester. For this component, the course instructor led the group initially, and as the semester continued, students were asked to facilitate the fishbowl group using the instructor's demonstration from earlier in the semester to serve as a model for their practice. During the later part of the semester, the students facilitated the fishbowl while the instructor was available to offer suggestions/prompts if the facilitators felt 'stuck' and requested assistance. The fishbowl allowed students to participate in a group counseling experience without requiring they be 'clients.' Within the fishbowl group, appropriate limits were placed on probing and topics; students in the fishbowl explored topics that they might explore with their faculty advisor (for example, stresses of balancing graduate school with other responsibilities, coping strategies, questioning whether they belong in graduate school and procrastination). Potential topics were discussed prior to the fishbowl and students clearly understood it was not a typical counseling group, in that the topics and the process did not tap into any in-depth personal exploration. The presence, facilitation of the group (early in the semester), and coaching provided by the instructor (later in the semester) ensured that students would be introduced to groupwork skills and asked to demonstrate them as part of the group counseling course.

Along with participation in the fishbowl, students were required to participate in a 10-session task group that required a service-learning project; for this activity, students broke up into service learning task groups of six or seven. During the task groups, the students were encouraged to behaviorally put into practice the skills and techniques presented in the beginning of class and in the fishbowl. For example, students might practise the skill of drawing out a silent member or clarifying a statement made by a member.

Students who elected to participate wrote responses to the journal questions regarding their task group. A student randomly passed out numbers to all students in the classes. The journals were labeled with the randomly assigned student number and group name for later matching of the various entries for analysis by group. Groups met a minimum of 10 times and journaling took about 20 minutes outside of class weekly. At the end of the semester, the journals were collected by a student

who put all research materials in a confidential box in the program's main office. The researchers at no time knew which students elected to participate. The instructor did not grade the task-group journals for the purposes of the group counseling course.

Analysis

The present study explored themes from students' journals, which were based upon their observations, behaviors, and reactions while participating in a task group as part of their group counseling course. Themes were then coded and analyzed using critical incidence methodology (Flanagan, 1954), which is a research method that defines systematic procedures for the collection, analysis, and reporting of 'observed incidents of special significance to participants in a clearly defined environment/activity' (Kiweewa, 2010, p. 79). This process included selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in which students' entries were analyzed based on ASGW's (2000) core training standards skills II.D.2. (for example, group leadership skills observed or exhibited, observation of group stages, and observation of group dynamics). Students' journal entries were the only data source; other data such as participant observation of the actual group meetings or class discussions regarding the task groups were not collected in order to preserve a naturally occurring learning environment. For both the group themes and stages, students' interpretation of the group events written in the journals was coded. In addition to the items students identified as specific skills, stages and other groups themes, researchers coded items in which students clearly articulated the phenomena without explicitly using the corresponding terminologies.

Journal coding

The raters who coded and analyzed the data were the first and third authors of the manuscript, both were counselor educators in the training program when the research took place. The data set was divided into four separate parts, and the raters worked independently on each part, then returned for a consensus meeting. Four separate meetings occurred. During the initial coding process, the raters achieved an inter-rater agreement rate of 85%. They then discussed any discrepancies and

adjusted coding until they had a 100% agreement. The final codes are based on the refined codes in which consensus was found.

Table 1. Entries by group

Group	1**	2	3	4	5	6	Total***
Item*							
Staying on task*	85	56	62	101	63	52	419
Acknowledging member themes*	73	7	81	39	19	14	233
Group stage	31	31	34	30	21	32	179
Seeking and receiving information*	22	46	18	27	18	17	148
Addressing member statements*	33	46	25	5	7	20	136
Helping members participate*	23	50	3	20	18	17	131
Addressing member behavior*	50	2	29	13	2	8	104
Self-disclosure*	10	10	3	5	14	8	50
Feedback*	6	1	2	5	4	8	26

Notes: *Items are paraphrased from the ASGW Professional Standards for the training of group workers. The reader is encouraged to consult the standards for the exact wording.

** Groups 1, 2, and 3 are from one course section, with 4, 5, and 6 representing the second course section.

***Items are listed in order of highest frequency for the total group.

Results

The journals were coded based on ASGW (2000) training standards (Section II.D.2). Table 1 presents the final coding information from the six different groups, across the two course sections; the last column presents the total frequency information for all participants. In general,

the more tangible or basic skills were found more frequently. The highest number of skills demonstrated in the task groups, as indicated by students' journals, was remaining on task and focused ($n = 419$). Acknowledging member themes was the second highest behavior ($n = 233$), followed by identifying group stage ($n = 179$). Exchanging information ($n = 148$), responding to members' statements ($n = 136$), and encouraging members' participation ($n = 131$) were similar in the numbers of skills reported to be present in the task groups. Skills that are more intangible or advanced were found less frequently within the data. Attending to member behavior ($n = 104$), providing appropriate self-disclosure ($n = 50$), and giving and receiving feedback ($n = 26$) appeared least frequently in the journals.

All codes in individual journals were analysed by course section to verify that each section did not have highly deviant responses in comparison to their peers in other course sections. Although the majority of the scales were comparable to their peers, four of the codes had high variability between groups in the items of interest. These codes with variability included encouraging members (from 3 to 50 observations between groups), addressing member behavior (from 2 to 50 observations between groups), addressing member statements (from 5 to 46 observations between groups) and acknowledging group themes statements (from 7 to 81 observations between groups). These results will be explored in further detail in the discussion section. .

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate if counselors-in-training exposed to a service-learning task group would demonstrate the skills development expected by the professional standards. Results indicated that while many group counseling skills were demonstrated in the task group, not all skills were manifested. In general, the more advanced the skill (for example, self-disclosure, feedback, addressing another member's behavior), the less likely students in training reported to have observed or utilized the skill in group. These skills are critical to effective group therapy, however, they likely feel less 'safe' to the counselor-in-training. They involve risk in giving feedback, with the possibility of frustration or anger being returned by the recipient. Self-

disclosure involves risk in revealing one's self. Finally, confronting another member's behavior is risky due to potential recipient responses. This could be a reflection of the developmental stage of the students who were in the early process of developing group skills. Group skills, as with other counseling skills, develop over time with higher-order or 'less safe' skills manifesting more during group internship. This also speaks to the importance of advanced training in groupwork. Regardless of an advanced group course or group-focused internship, students need to acquire these skills and feel comfortable using them.

Remaining on task and focused was the theme that appeared most often in the journals. This indicates the students spent the majority of time focusing on accomplishing their tasks. This was expected given the course assignment placed students in task groups. Attentions to group themes and group stage were also rated as very high in the journals. The group stage code (Tuckman 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) was identified if the students noted the correct group stage (for example, forming, norming, storming, performing, adjourning) based on what they were describing in their journals. If the stage clearly was incorrect (for example, describing a group obviously stuck in the formation stage was reported as a working stage), the response was not coded.

Exchanging information, responding to members' statements, encouraging members' participation, and attending to member behavior were demonstrated with a moderate frequency. This may suggest that the students were attentive to the relationship aspect of the task groups because these skills aim to enhance communication and interpersonal activities among members. At the opposite end of the spectrum, feedback and self-disclosure were particularly low in the scores. It seems that those skills were difficult to demonstrate in the task groups. The fact that providing feedback to their peers was ranked as very low is troublesome to us, in that it is a critical skill for group counselors. Perhaps the students did not feel comfortable giving direct feedback, no matter how gently presented, to their peers. This could reflect the students' comfort in their group, lack of confidence in the skill, or another group process issue. Another potential explanation for this finding, however, may be that the nature of task groups may make some forms of self-disclosure or providing feedback less 'safe.' As such, it could be that the level of students' skills found may be appropriate in that situation, and that fishbowl exercises may be necessary for students

to learn and practise those skills. It could be that students need more confidence and guided support, such as in group internship or an advanced group course. Skills guides, such as by Hartley and Dawson (2010) may be helpful in providing exercises for students to utilize for practicing these types of skills.

Future research should explore this issue more fully. Journals indicated that the students reflected, and had numerous thoughts and feelings, but they were unwilling to translate them into the groups. Despite being encouraged to do so, many students' journals indicated that they wanted to complete the task and did not feel the task group was an appropriate group to self-disclose what they were feeling in relation to the task group. This could also speak to a group dynamics/comfort in group issue. It also supports the potential benefits of an experiential process group.

We found group differences in some of the codes with four codes having high variability between groups. These items were encouraging members, (from 3 to 50 observations between groups), addressing member behavior (from 2 to 50 observations between groups), addressing member statements (from 5 to 46 observations between groups) and acknowledging group theme statements (from 7 to 81 observations between groups). For these items it is possible the variation was a function of group norms. That is, some groups may have avoided addressing other member's behaviors more than others. Some groups were more or less functional than others. Students varied in how adept they were at noticing, interpreting, and exploring what they had observed. Some groups, by random chance, may have had more of these students. It seemed some of the groups were more insightful and spent more time on process issues while others did not seem to pick up on these as much and appeared to avoid here-and-now or process discussions at all costs.

In addition, the raters informally observed a parallel trend between the codes in journal entries and the group developmental stage. For instance, skills effective for initial stages were noted more frequently in the earlier journal entries whereas skills effective during later stages were present in later journal entries. Overall, the raters agreed that the journals reflected students' insights and growth over the semester.

At the university where this research was conducted, students complete two courses in group counseling. Students did not experience

any overall training deficits as a result of the experimental experiential groups because any skills not mastered in the first course are addressed during the second course.

Limitations and Future Explorations

The data used in this research are from two courses at one university, and therefore perhaps not generalizable to other universities or settings. The findings do, however, generate hypotheses and additional research ideas relating to the pedagogy of groupwork. Researchers could use the results of this study to explore if similar themes might emerge at other universities. More importantly, we believe the major limitation of this study was the lack of a comparison group that used experiential groups. By replicating the study with the use of experiential groups, it is possible to examine the similarities and differences between the learning outcomes of task groups and experiential groups. In addition, researchers may explore if other interventions or pedagogical tools could be implemented along with a service learning activity to address the group variability found in this study.

The journals are a limitation in that they are self-reports, and not observations of students' acquired skills, and as such should be interpreted in that way. Future research could address this concern by having group sessions videotaped, and then using trained raters to code the results. This would allow coding of all manifested behaviors/skills of interest and eliminate the self-report bias. Additionally, the students are novices, particularly at the beginning of the course, therefore they may not always be able to identify or describe what they are practising or observing. An outside observer who is knowledgeable in groups would overcome this weakness; however, an outside observer can disrupt the natural class process and securing a well-trained observer who is blind to the study purpose may be challenging.

Conclusion

Debate exists regarding the type of group that is most beneficial for students' learning of group process and skills. Experiential groups have

been a part of groupwork training for as long as group counseling has been taught. Current concern for the risks of multiple relationships is valid, although certainly not limited to group counseling courses.

Rex Stockton, a pioneer in experiential groupwork, utilized experiential groups in counselor preparation programs. Based on their interview with Stockton, McDonnell, Toth and Aldarondo (2005) recommended that group researchers continue to investigate methods of *how* students can best learn to apply groupwork skills. The current study was an attempt to answer this call: how can students gain knowledge and skills necessary to become effective group leaders?

The problem with teaching group counseling lies in the lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of pedagogical methods currently used. Specifically, it is unknown how much counseling students acquire the necessary skills and knowledge through experiential groups and if there are alternative teaching methods. This study provides some clarification on whether students exhibit group counseling skills in a task group without obligatory experiential group participation. The results prompt new questions and research directions to pursue in new and exciting pedagogical interventions. This research demonstrates that multiple group skills are manifested via task groups. While students exhibited basic or 'safe' group intervention skills, they did not report use of more advanced or less 'safe' group skills. This speaks to the importance of an advanced group course or group internship for students to acquire these higher order skills within their counselor training program.

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