Teaching Group Processes through Multiple Group Leadership Opportunities in a Masters Level Counselor Education Program

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Abstract: Utilizing an experiential component in group work training is a prominent feature in Counselor Education programs. Although numerous models have been proposed, the vast majority offer limited explanations of incorporating the number of hours of group participation and observation recommended by the Professional Standards for the Training of Group Workers (ASGW, 2000). This article presents an experiential group training model with multiple opportunities for group leadership in a masters level Counselor Education program, and provides a description of common themes experienced by group-leaders-in-training as they progressed through the culminating feature which served as the capstone of this approach.

Keywords: group counseling; experiential group training; masters level; counselor education

The preparation of School Counselors and Clinical Mental Health Counselors is accomplished at the Master's level. Candidates for the Master's degree in Counseling have earned undergraduate degrees in Education, Psychology or a number of related social science programs. Master's programs in Counseling are comprised of up to 60 semester hours which is inclusive of multiple practicum and internship experiences. In such programs, students must master clinical concepts to the point of being proficient in the application of those concepts in clinical settings. One area of clinical focus inherent in all counseling master's curricula is working with clients in small therapeutic group settings. This component is the focus of the present article.

A central component of courses which prepare group leaders is, and has been, participation in experiential groups (Shumaker, Ortiz, & Brenninkmeyer, 2011; Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993). Experiential groups consist of 8-12 students who are encouraged to examine group processes and other innate aspects of group formation from a subjective perspective without expecting to share personal challenges or concerns, although members are not prevented from doing so if they so choose. Development of interpersonal communication skill, enhanced perspective taking, and greater self-understanding are all considered advantages of the experiential group. Shumaker et al. (2011) found, from a survey of 82 graduate programs that 85% feature an experiential

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group in the group leadership training process of their graduate students. Likewise, Merta et al. (1993) found that 88% of the sampled graduate programs included some form of experiential group. Such practices have been codified in the standards of The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2016) and all programs accredited by the organization now include experiential groups as a requisite curricular component.

Training Leaders Using Experiential Groups

Considering the widespread use of experiential groups, multiple models of experiential training have been suggested in order to create an effective pedagogical approach while simultaneously abiding by the ethical standards of group training (Akos, 2004; Fall & Levitov, 2002; Furr & Barret, 2000; Hensley, 2002; Kane, 1995; Sklare et al., 1996). The most popular models of group leadership pedagogy fall into the following categories: (1) an experiential group where the instructor observes another individual leading the experiential group or the instructor leads, and (2) an experiential group led by a leader from outside the program or another faculty member other than the instructor (Merta et al., 1993; Shumaker et al., 2011). In addition to CACREP, other major accrediting institutions and counseling associations continue to give credence to and validate the utilization of the experiential group as a training tool. For example, the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 2000) suggests a minimum of 20 hours of participation in a group and observation of a group as either a member or leader. Kane (1995) expressed the core expectations behind ASGW's standards by noting that "the necessary knowledge base can be provided through a basic course in group theory and practice that includes, as a minimum, principles of group dynamics, group leadership styles and approaches, knowledge of group work types, group work methods, and development of skills" (p. 183). CACREP (2016) requires 10 hours training in a small group format for one academic term. One question that some authors pose, however, is whether observing another person leading a group is enough to meet the standards of effective group leader training (Stockon & Toth, 1996). Shumaker et al. (2011) suggest that an optimal format of training in an experiential group could involve interacting as both member and leader. Similarly, Sklare et al. (1996) present a "here and now" experiential group format, emphasizing experience and summarized by: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand (author unknown)" (p. 268). The authors assert that students must understand via personal experience their own vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and strengths before they can grasp the individual struggles experienced by prospective clients. By encouraging experiential learning as a member and a leader, complex concepts are mastered not just on a cognitive level but on an emotional level as well.

The purpose of the present article is to familiarize the reader with a pedagogical strategy for counseling group leader education. The authors will demonstrate that the proposed strategy meets or exceeds established standards for training counseling group leaders, addresses ethical issues incumbent with experiences marked by potentially personally sensitive content, and provides for profound growth among the participants therein. Students' first-hand experiences as group participants and leaders were examined and themes were identified.

While it should be noted that data, in the form of first-hand accounts of the training experience, are garnered from 4 individuals who completed the multi-year, multi-component group leadership training, a major facet of the present article is the description of what the authors believe to be a unique approach to readying counseling students to assume roles as group leaders.

Important Considerations for Group Leadership Training

Two important foundational aspects in the training of counselors is 1) the acquisition of skills, and, 2) the development of interpersonal growth (Sklare et al., 1996). Although the therapeutic purpose of the experience should not come at the expense of skills training and group processes training, experiential groups can certainly provide interpersonal growth which may not be as present in training groups that use role-play simulations as a pedagogical form (Merta et al., 1993).

It should be noted that while the efficacy of the experiential component of group leadership training has gathered widespread support, there are potential ethical issues which should be addressed. Shumaker et al. (2011) report harmful relationships, mandatory participation, and informed consent as the major ethical concerns for experiential training groups. The authors go on to suggest that increased safeguards in many masters-level experiential groups include student self-disclosure training, a plan to communicate to students no-evaluation grading procedures for experiential group participation, and informed consent that details potential risks.

Furthermore, Goodrich (2008) posits that while the field of counseling works to honor professional standards when training group counselors, there is an inherent conflict which emerges in the experiential group classroom involving particular ethical gridlocks. Goodrich also notes that experiential groups led by the instructor are particularly scrutinized because mandatory standards set by CACREP and ASGW have in the past conflicted with American Counseling Association (ACA) guidelines on what constitutes a harmful relationship. However, with the most recent iterations of the ACA code of ethics (2005, 2014) a broader definition of dual relationships, to include potentially harmful vs. potentially helpful relationships now exists. In short, the code now recognizes that potentially helpful relationships, previously termed "dual relationships" can exist when such a relationship has a potential to be helpful rather than hurtful. Such a conceptualization of the relationships among instructors, group leadership students, and group student-participants, with due diligence paid to assure that the relationships remain helpful, can provide all involved with more latitude regarding group leadership and training. These ethical considerations are considered to be of utmost concern by the present authors and caution was exercised to reduce risk to an acceptable level by thoroughly preparing students and by obtaining informed consent at each and all levels of participation. While it is certainly advisable to carefully monitor any training exercise in which students have the potential to disclose personal and potentially sensitive information, participation in group, with proper understanding of the risks involved can readily be characterized as potentially helpful. That is to say, the potential benefits, when due diligence is paid to potential ethical dilemmas, far outweigh the potential for harm.

Method

Research Team

Two of the authors are counselor educators, one of the authors is a student in the Counselor Education program, and all three of the authors participated in the model of group training that we describe below. The first author is primarily responsible for the training of group workers and the third author is the primary instructor for the introductory class in the Counselor Education program.

Participants

The participants were master's level students in a Counselor Education program in the southern United States. A total of four students participated in this study all of whom completed both the C1, C2, and C3 experiences that are described below. All four student participants were asked to assist the instructor in co-leading and co-supervising the students in the C2 experience. The participants included three females and one male. The age range for the participants was 25-35 years old. Furthermore, the participants had been in the program for between 1 ½ and 2 years and had at minimum completed their practicum experience.

Pedagogical Model

It should be noted that the model of instruction described in the following sections is believed to be unique in Counselor Education. No model presently described in the literature included the emphasis on a deliberate and conscious longitudinal progression from group participant to group leader, nor had students engaged in all levels of group participation and leadership over multiple semesters.

The model of group leadership training adopted by the department, and which constitutes the model utilized in the present article, consists of 4 separate but related experiences spread out across 4 semesters. The first experience (C1) students have with the group process is incorporated into their Introduction to Counseling class and consists of over 12 hours of participation, as members, of a process group. The second experience (C2) is a traditional group process class wherein students participate as member-leaders throughout the semester. The third experience (C3) is an advanced elective course in which students demonstrating high levels of potential and motivation for group leadership are, under close supervision, utilized as leaders of groups comprised of members participating in the aforementioned first experience. Finally, in the fourth experience (C4) a select number of advanced and highly skilled students are chosen to co-lead and then later to act as supervisor/consultants to group leaders enrolled in the C2 experience. An illustration of the model is presented in Table 1 and a more detailed explanation of the model follows.

Experience one: Introduction to counseling course. The first course (hereafter designated as C1) met for 150 minutes per week over the course of a 15 week semester. The course is an introductory class on the counseling profession. On the fifth week the class structure changed from purely didactic through the inclusion of an experiential group component (75 minutes). As a requirement of the course, students were to attend 10 process

groups. No evaluation for participation was implied but rather, the only evaluative aspect of the process group was attendance.

Experience two: Introduction to group work course. The second course (hereafter designated as C2) met for 150 minutes per week over the course of a 15 week semester. Class enrollment was limited to 12 students. C2 included two exams, a group proposal paper, and weekly reflection papers. The structure of each week was comprised of two parts: a didactic component (75 minutes) and an experiential component (75 minutes). The didactic component incorporated lectures and discussions about group leadership skills and group counseling theory using two primary texts: *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) and *Interactive Group Counseling and Therapy* (Kline, 2003). The experiential component involved 12 group meetings in which students participated as members of a group throughout the semester. All group meetings were video recorded for supervisory purposes. At mid-semester, each student in the course had the opportunity to take the role of group leader at least once using a co-leadership design. The group co-leader approach was incorporated to reduce student anxiety about group leadership, to provide an opportunity to give and receive honest feedback, and to give students the experience of a collaborative process (Romano, 1998; Hensley, 2002). By the time group members began to lead the group in Weeks 6-11, they had not only learned the process of co-leadership in the didactic aspect of the class, but had seen co-leadership modelled by the instructor and advanced students from the C4 experience which will be described below. When peer leadership began, the instructor and the advanced students met with the designated peer leaders the week before leading to review and critique the video of the previous group meeting and the overall progress of the group. The designated peer leaders were required to complete a group meeting planning sheet in order to prepare for the next meeting. Immediately following the next group meeting, the instructor and advanced students met with the peer leaders to review, reflect, and critique their experience of group leadership. A final group meeting for the semester was led by the instructor and the two advanced students.

Experience three: Advanced group work course. The third course (hereafter designated as C3) in the four course sequence provides students an opportunity to lead a group from start to finish. C3 met for 150 minutes per week over the course of 15 weeks with class enrollment limited to 15 students. C3 included weekly planning sheets, weekly processing sheets, and a final reflection paper. The structure of each week was comprised of two parts: group supervision (75 minutes) and an experiential component (75 minutes). Group supervision consisted of monitoring the quality of leadership and to further the understanding and the personalization of the role of group leader (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). As mentioned earlier in the discussion of Experience One, the experiential group did not begin until the fifth week of the semester so the first four weeks of C3 were primarily focused on preparing to lead. The group supervision component was more didactic and focused on the principles of group dynamics, group member selection criteria, co-leader team formation, planning and processing procedures, and scheduling concerns. On the fourth week of the semester, the students selected group members from the C1 course based on a 3 minute interview of each potential group member which were conducted on video. Once groups began in the fifth week of the semester, the structure of the group supervision component changed and focused primarily on giving feedback to student group leaders based upon segments of video from their most recent group meeting.

The experiential component to C3 was the actual facilitation of the groups. Recall that as part of the C1 experience, students were required to be members in a group led by students in C3. This group experience included 10 meetings which occurred on a weekly basis. In order to create as much opportunity for students to participate in C3, a three member rotating leadership team approach was used in each group. On a rotating basis each week, two members of the leadership team would facilitate the group while the third member would observe either by video or by being in the room.

Experience four: Independent study in group leadership. In order to co-lead and co-supervise the experiential component of Experience Two (C2), four students who had demonstrated proficient skill in group leadership during the C3 experience were invited to assist the instructor. These four advanced students participated in an independent study (hereafter designated as C4), and each experiential component of the C2 experience was led and/or supervised by the instructor and the same two advanced students the entire semester. Leadership rotated between the instructor and the two advanced students. The instructor co-led the first meeting with one of the advanced students while the other advanced student observed via live video feed. The second meeting the same process was used except the instructor co-led with the other advanced student. After the second meeting, C4 students led the group under the supervision of the instructor for the next few weeks until the C2 group members began rotating as co-leaders. At mid-semester, the students in the C2 course began rotating leadership while the instructor and the C4 students observed and supervised the process.

As a result of this format, the Counselor Education program met CACREP and ASGW training guidelines by requiring every student to receive over 27 hours of participation as either a group member or a group leader during two required C1 and C2 group experiences. Furthermore, by offering the C3 experience, the program provided students with the opportunity to receive up to three group experiences if group work was of particular interest to them. A fourth group experience (C4) was available for those students who chose to focus on group work as a specialty, but was limited to only a handful of students due to the limited number of leadership opportunities. The number of hours in each group experience and the nature of the experience for each level of instruction is summarized in Table 1.

Reflecting on the Process

Journaling of experiences at all levels was assigned but the focus was on students (n=4) who had completed the entire series of experiences were analyzed to provide a more complete picture of the entire process and to document their development as group leaders. Each week, the participants in C4 completed a journal entry as they reflected upon their experience as a co-leader and co-supervisor during their fourth group experience. Recall that the four students selected for C4 had been participants at each previous level of instruction (C1, C2, and C3). Participants were told that they could type their journals or use a journal with handwritten entries. The journals of the participants were not evaluated for grading purposes, but the participants were informed that the journals would be analyzed for the purpose of researching the present model of group training.

In order to analyze the journals, the authors used an adaptation of the phenomenological method used by Moustakas (1994) and Swank and Lenes (2013). After

all the journals were collected, the participants in the study along with the first author began the process of horizonalization which involves identifying and noting the most significant statements from each of the participants. The participants and the first author then met together as a group to generate meaning units or themes from the significant statements that were identified from each of the journals. Once these meaning units were generated,

Table 1. Description of the roles and purpose of each group experience

Group Experience	Student Role	Number of Meetings	Purpose of Experience
1st Experience (Requirement of the introductory course in the counseling program [C1])	Group Member	10 (12+ hours)	• Experience what it is like to be a member of a group • Increase awareness of self, others, and interpersonal issues • Develop an understanding of how personal issues and style of communication influence group members.
2nd Experience (Requirement of the introduction to group work course [C2])	Group Member	11 (13+ hours)	• Experience what it is like to be a member of a group • Increase awareness of self, others, and interpersonal issues • Develop an understanding of how personal issues and style of communication influence group members. • Provide an opportunity to practice beginning leadership skills
	Co-leader	1 (1+ hours)	
3rd Experience (Requirement of the elective course in advanced group work [C3])	Co-leader	10 (12+ hours)	• Conceptualize and practice group interventions • Provide opportunities to practice leadership skills
4th Experience (Requirement of an independent study in group work [C4])	Co-leader	6 (7+ hours)	• Conceptualize and practice group interventions • Provide opportunities to assist in supervision of group leaders • Increase group leader efficacy
	Co-supervisor	6 (12+ hours)	

the participants then revisited the data at a later date in order to confirm the accuracy of the statements associated with each of the emerging themes. The fact that the participants were a part of the data analysis is significant as it better verifies the appropriateness of

associating certain statements with certain themes in situations where more clarity was necessary.

Themes Identified in the Journal Analysis

The participants distinguished four central themes extant within their experiences. The themes were a) development of counseling efficacy, b) dual relationships, c) supervision techniques, and d) ownership of group leadership. Each of these themes is examined in the following paragraphs with quotations offered from the journals for elaboration.

Counseling Efficacy

A theme documented by the participants throughout the C4 group experience involved the acquisition of techniques and skills in the group, the awareness of growth as a group leader, and the recognition of confidence in these skills. This combination of similar themes was termed "development of counseling efficacy." Awareness of confidence was a focus even before co-leading began, as expressed by one participant: "As week 1 of co-leading approaches, I'm feeling nervous. My worries at this point stem mostly from feelings of inadequacy." As co-leading by the participants continued, low confidence became a conduit for change via awareness, as illustrated in this participant's statement, "When I'm uncomfortable I tend to take the easy way out and justify my backseat attitude by attributing it to being more able to soak things up that way and learn from others." Another participant focused on confidence level in the statement, "I know [the faculty supervisor] wouldn't have asked me to participate in this experience if he didn't have faith in my competence and ability as a group leader. But I'm still nervous; nervous to let him down, to embarrass myself, to fall short of the task, and most of all, to not be effective." A fourth participant wrote:

> I'm afraid to say things that are either hard for me to say or hard for other people to hear…This is a very common theme in group which is so appropriate. So I'm learning and experiencing and working on my own goals vicariously through watching my group members take their own risks.

These entries indicated that confidence in skill level and awareness of effectiveness are fortified for the participants in a two-fold way: 1) during reflection of the confidence instilled by the faculty supervisor's recognition of the participant's skill level, and 2) during a participant's reflection of their role in the group process and the group process itself.

In addition to the confidence necessary to take risks with new behaviors, participants expressed that the C4 group experience presented opportunities for practicing interventions that are integral to effective group leadership and the development of expertise. One participant stated:

> I knew that it was far more important for me to make what I knew was an appropriate intervention (given this specific situation, with another member at another time it could have been too directive), than to be concerned with what a member thought of me as a leader.

Another participant expressed, "…Patterns are sometimes really hard to pick out, especially while trying to remember week after week what's going on with each person. This is starting to get slightly easier…"

Making the transition to a supervisory role after an extended period of group leader practice provides a unique opportunity for students to further their counseling efficacy and track their growth. One participant stated at the end of his or her experience, "I feel like the amount of progress that occurred was far greater than the past two groups that I have been a part of as both a leader and a member." In response to the structure of co-leading and the consequent personal growth experienced thereby, one participant said, "The amount of processing that occurred this semester with 3 minds instead of just my own has opened my mind to new possibilities and ways of thinking that would not have been there otherwise." In this way, the C4 group experience, as demonstrated by the journal entries,

provided students an opportunity to amass and utilize skills gathered from the many group experiences over the semesters while instilling a high level of confidence in their practice.

Dual Relationships

Another theme which became apparent related to the participants' anxieties and reassurances regarding dual relationships with both the faculty supervisor and the group members. The participants described reactions toward critiquing their faculty supervisor, challenging their peers, and expressing their opinions openly and authentically to both the faculty supervisor and the group members. One participant expressed having to critique the faculty supervisor as:

> My gut reaction was like what? I can't say that to [the faculty supervisor]. He's my teacher, my mentor. How can I criticize him? And then I also question my opinion. I think well, he is exponentially better at this than I am so he must know better than I what the hell is going on in there and therefore his 'path' of where he is taking things will almost definitely be better than anywhere I'd take it.

Another participant experienced this dual relationship as stifling to him or her, writing, "I fear letting myself down by letting down my group by not approaching conflicts that might improve group interaction, cohesion, and interrelatedness if only because of this fear of overstretching my bounds as a student/peer to [the faculty supervisor]." However, as participants became more attuned to their role as co-leader with the faculty supervisor, journal entries began to reflect a confidence supported by the same role that initially was threatening. One participant wrote, "My experience of anxiety about co-leading with an authority figure has diminished through the act of the [faculty supervisor] giving respect and credence to the ideas and hunches brought forth by us, the two co-leaders." Another participant expressed positive experiences in which he or she was extended respect and consideration for her input, and acknowledgement of a collegial relationship with the faculty supervisor writing:

> I am (usually) confident that even if you [the faculty supervisor] completely disagree, you'll hear me out and at least respect my input enough to take it into consideration. I know that part of this comfort comes from our relationship dynamic that is far more open and honest.

Entries about dual relationships between group members and participants were focused on C4 participants relationships with C2 group members outside of sessions. One participant wrote:

> One aspect that I notice difficult is the separation between student and co-leader, both in myself and in my classmates…I would worry that if I challenged them in group or asked them something that made them feel uncomfortable in group whether that member would as a classmate bring it out into the outside environment.

A second participant wrote about a personal concern of cultivating a dual relationship with a peer, stating:

> Another concern I have is that of one of the members. I know him rather well, have talked to him often and outside of school. I wonder if he will treat me differently or with disrespect, often dismissing me or something of that nature.

Although some of the participants felt uncomfortable in some interactions with group members, a third participant wrote about how group members regarded him or her over time, stating:

> …lately its started to feel like the members are finally seeing me and my co-leader as credible enough to take critiques from and to actually listen to. It'd be understandable for them to disregard us when we try to help or lead them due to us being in some sense the same position in school, but it's been quite the opposite.

Overwhelmingly, C4 participants recognized that dual relationships, although present and at times anxiety-provoking, did not restrict the learning process, and in fact seemed to increase confidence among C2 group members and C4 leaders alike. In this way, having these two new types of relationships provided an experience to students that was, although sometimes intimidating, ultimately an opportunity for learning.

Supervision Techniques

Participants in the C4 group experience were afforded the opportunity to co-supervise, with the faculty supervisor, for the first time. The journals of the C4 participants reflected two sub-themes related to supervision. The first involved supervision provided to the C2 group members and the second focused on supervision provided by the faculty supervisor to the C4 participants themselves.

The C4 participants cited their previous experiences with group as a resource for their work as co-supervisors, with an enlightened sense of empathy being a common theme. With regards to taking a supervisory role with C2 group members, the participants were able to assess their previous group experiences in conjunction with their current supervisory practice and use them as a resource. One participant wrote, "I recognize in them things I went through myself as a member. The ability to empathize even more because of this feels like an added bonus while speaking with them." The memories C4 participants had of their own group experiences and the resultant increased empathy were also cited as obstacles to providing critiques as noted in the following journal entry:

> I also find it especially difficult to give them feedback on the times where I felt like they may not have done so well. I don't want to crush their spirits or make them think that I think they were terrible. Because even if they were terrible, that's ok. It's their very first time leading ever!!!

Still other C4 participants recognized and wrote about the difficulty of taking a balanced approach:

> Taking part in this with the students now is a unique challenge in that I want to point things out to them because I am still invested in the overall outcome for all members; but at the same time I know it is just as important for their experience to have to catch these things themselves and figure out their approach to the meetings.

The second subtheme that emerged from the journal entries, the significance of supervision provided by the faculty supervisor to the C4 participants, was revealed to be an important factor in navigating the complexity of the supervision process. In response, the faculty supervisor supplied necessary modeling and encouragement. One participant stated:

> I noticed [the faculty supervisor] sitting back more and allowing us to take over a bit. This made me nervous at first, but after seeing how I naturally started to give

> input and seeing his reaction as approving for the things I was saying, allowed me to continue doing this.

Another participant wrote:

> He often repeats that he finds our ideas and instincts useful to the process of analyzing through a compliment such as: 'Seriously, guys, I couldn't do this without you.' This encouragement galvanizes my ability to be more candid in my intuitions, providing me the necessary confidence and support that helps me to share more…helps us all to get a deeper understanding of the group members and their interactions.

Additionally, the modeling provided by the faculty supervisor was influential in the development of supervision skills as explained in this C4 participant's statement that:

> [The faculty supervisor] is also helpful in that he might ask us questions or allow us to explain important pieces of observations we've seen in the videos together. Allowing us to interpret it seems to be helpful for us in learning the ways of teaching this sort of material.

> The encouragement and modeling helped the participants to further their understanding of the supervisory process. As noted in the journal entries, this was important to the growth of the participants for their novel role as supervisor to the C2 group members.

Ownership of Group Leadership

A final theme noted in the journal entries was ownership of the group leadership role. This theme incorporates the idea that, through a strong connection to the work, a deeper, more meaningful learning experience is had. This connection to the group was sometimes illustrated in the disappointment the C4 participants encountered when falling below their own expectations. One participant wrote:

> I think that group tonight was difficult for me because although at one stage I really didn't like the focus of it, I kept thinking you [the faculty supervisor] knows group better than me so if you were taking it in that direction you must have a reason/goal. I am fairly confident that if I had been leading with a peer co-leader I would have intervened and attempted to try another angle.

Another example involved a participant asking to relinquish, for the time being, co-leading with the faculty supervisor as a way to get closer to the group process: "In fact, I suggest letting the two graduate co-leaders lead without the professor at least once because through this exercise I feel more proficient and involved in the process and group preparedness modality." At other times when the C4 participants were observing and C2 group members were peer leading, a different attitude emerged of feeling distant: "I know we are still influencing the outcome by our feedback to the co-leaders (before, during and after they lead); but we are really just observing. I don't feel we have a presence in the room."

> Strong connections to the C2 group members also fostered a sense of meaningfulness reflecting the type of real-world experience that counselors often face. One participant said, "It's difficult to see some of the members work through tough issues. It's even more difficult to watch some members not take opportunities." At other times, this empathy towards the group members created an environment to practice self-control. One participant stated that, "Although there never is a safety net, there were moments where I

was positive that I had done what I could to relinquish the session up to my intuition and follow it." The C4 participants also made journal entries which alluded to personal ownership of their growth and development as group leaders. One C4 participant wrote:

> I was discussing my own experience over this semester with my father recently and I wasn't surprised to hear him say that when I talk about group not only do I 'light up' but it has been an opportunity for him to see my heart.

In this personal manner, as well as in the personal experiences of leading and supervising the group, the C4 participants became particularly close to the experience as showcased by their journal entries that assigned meaningful relationships to both group members and the supervisory process itself.

In summary, the process of the C4 group experience contained multiple beneficial thematic elements that appeared in the journal entries of the participants. Technical as well as intuitive skills, empathy, and modeled behaviors were beneficial factors present in the learning process. Likewise, encouragement of peers, meaningful relationships, and healthy attachment to the group were developed and nurtured. The C4 participants also iterated that the faculty supervisor provided overarching benefits through reinforcement, inclusion, and modeling techniques. Furthermore, the C4 participants recognized that challenging C2 group members in session and the faculty supervisor in and out of sessions were enhancing their development as leaders even though they readily acknowledged the difficulties of these relationships.

Discussion

The model proposed in this article includes numerous advantages and several challenges that require consideration. First, the provision of multiple participation and leadership opportunities gives students the chance to build group leadership efficacy by increasing the likelihood of successful leadership experiences. Similarly, the use of a co-leader format can help to decrease the sometimes debilitating anxiety that novice group leaders experience which may limit determinants to the development of group leadership efficacy. Also, as reported by the participants in this study, the co-supervision that is unique to this model served to increase group leadership efficacy and supported the designation of a specialty in group work. Additionally, the format of this model allows students to lead a group from formation to termination including group composition considerations in the selection of group members. Finally, the use of multiple experiences as a group member and a group leader provided students with multiple opportunities for personal growth. The present model can best be differentiated from more traditional models of group leader training by students' multiple exposures to the group process in different roles. In traditional and more common models, students are only exposed to group leader training in a process most analogous to Experience 2 (see Table 1).

Similar to other models of group training (Carroll & ASGW, 1985; Hensley, 2002; Kane, 1995), students had the opportunity to perceive the group process from multiple roles. In this model, students experience the group as a member, as a co-leader, as an observer, and as a co-supervisor. In comparison to other models, this approach allows students the time to more fully acclimate to each of these roles and the different perspectives that are associated with each. In this sense, participation in the model provides students with both a breadth and depth of exposure to the group process.

As in all experimental models, certain limitations arise from the present model that deserve consideration. Multiple relationships are considerably concerning because, as Goodrich (2008) affirms, ASGW and ACA guidelines require the avoidance of harmful relationships that create subjective or impaired professional judgment. At the same time, instructors have the duty of gatekeeping to protect the public from individuals who are not able to provide adequate services (Goodrich, 2008; Hensley, 2002; Sklare et al., 1996; Merta et al., 1993). The potential for the formation of harmful relationships during the multiple exposures to the group process, especially as students' roles change, can conflict with CACREP standards. The conflict arises when the instructor is simultaneously in an evaluative position while having knowledge of students' personal information (Shumaker et al., 2011; Furr & Barrett, 2000; Sklare et al., 1996). Ethical concerns for students' safety and prevention of negative outcomes caused by a multiple relationship created between a faculty supervisor and a student are significant because an imbalance of power can be created that can cause students some discomfort and distraction to success, or at the most undesirable extreme, create ethical breeches for faculty supervisors. Although safeguards including verbal and written warnings as well as a signed consent form are present to curtail unnecessary personal disclosure, risk is still apparent for students who may express extraneous information that can affect their status in the program. This is a limitation, particularly considering the predicament the faculty supervisor might get into when a gatekeeping, evaluative function restricts a student from continuing in a program due to self-disclosure. In response, however, these limitations are universal through most experiential training group opportunities (Shumaker et al., 2011; Goodrich, 2008; Hensley, 2002; Sklare et al., 1996; Merta et al., 1993).

Limitations of the Study

The present approach includes model-specific limitations with generalization to other disciplines not being possible. First, the opportunities to participate in the various group experiences decrease after the second group experience due to setting limitations on enrollment numbers for the courses. Additionally, cross-listing the hours with current CACREP internship requirements or as added hours to curriculum is ambiguous and is listed as voluntary intern hours instead of cross-listed specialized curricula hours. Equally, the supplementary hours required as a participant in the C4 group experience is extensive and not always attainable for students in other programs. As well, the entire model requires 4 semesters, which some programs may not be able to accommodate with their staff or in a timely fashion that best serves their students. Resources are also an important necessity, including video capabilities and communication between rooms via headsets and microphones.

As noted previously, the present study has various limitations that may be valuable to address in future research. First, the participants in the study lacked diversity with regards to race and socioeconomic status, so the experiences of the participants may not adequately reflect the experiences of minority or low SES students. Second, the participants were all trained in the same program located in a southern region of the United States. Additionally, the small sample size utilized in this study is appropriate for qualitative research intended to better understand the experience of the participants, but does not support generalizing the findings to the population at large due to the limited

number of individuals from whom data was collected. Finally, the use of an open, unstructured procedure such as having participants write reflection journals at alternating times throughout the semester about their experience resulted in uneven durations between reflections. This matter was complicated by interruptions in meetings that are part of an academic setting such as holidays, class cancellation, and class periods devoted to examination.

Implications for Group Training

The study presented is unique considering that although multiple studies recognize the different types of experiential models (Shumaker et al., 2011; Fall & Levitov, 2002; Hensley, 2002; Furr & Barret, 2000; Romano, 1998; Sklare et al., 1996; Kane, 1995), no studies were found that record experiences of master's students who were called upon to supervise the performance of their peers. Additionally, no other study was found that qualitatively explores the experiences of master's students during the capstone event of an extended experiential group training model that persists over multiple semesters.

The present study explored the experience of group leaders-in-training during the final segment of this four part model of group training. The study contributes to the research base in group leadership training because it investigates the experiences of group leaders in training after participating in a training model that meets or exceeds the guidelines suggested by both CACREP and ASGW. As suggested by several authors (Furr and Barrett, 2000; Stockton and Toth, 1996; Berger, 1996; Dies, 1980), the model described in this article was designed to address both the knowledge base and skill acquisition necessary for training group leaders. Although a few articles describe the outcome of training that meets the 10 hours of group participation required by CACREP (Cummings, 2001, Hensley, 2002; O'Halloran & McCartney, 2004), no other study was found describing the experiences of students after receiving training that meets the training guidelines suggested by ASGW and includes over 10 hours of group leadership. Recall that in the present model, students have an opportunity to participate in up to 57 hours of group work and over 20 hours of group leadership. While this is certainly more hours than prescribed, it is the position of the present authors that the students' qualitative experience is also enhanced by the multiple roles each plays in the group process: that of participant, participant/leader, leader, and finally consultant/co-supervisor.

The participants described an acquisition of techniques and skills in group leadership and increased confidence and awareness of growth as a group leader during this experience. Additionally, participants detailed the complexities that emerged as a result of the change in the relationships between them and both the faculty supervisor and the group members they co-supervised. Furthermore, the participants indicated that this was a deep and meaningful experience due to a high level of investment in the group process. Lastly, the results of this research has implications for academic disciplines other than Counselor Education. Pedagogical approaches from a variety of disciplines can be designed in a deliberate and longitudinal manner to utilize the enhanced skill set students are developing as they matriculate through their academic studies. Such designs provide numerous educational experiences in a limited time frame that can promote increased depth of learning and mastery. Fields of study in which the focus is on clinical skills, or on the development of interpersonal skills might be best informed by the present model. In the

present model, as in peer tutoring scenarios, students who have demonstrated mastery are called upon to assist with less developed students and thereby increase their skills and knowledge.

Research is needed to investigate if students report similar themes using this model and other models of group training. Additionally, future studies could include longitudinal investigations by collecting data during each of the four group experiences to identify critical incidents and developmental indicators for students as they progress through the training model. This study provides some support for the use of this model or an adaptation of it in disciplines with a clinical or interpersonal focus to provide students with the experiences essential for developing group leadership skills. Further, even though there is some risk of forming harmful dual relationships, it is far surpassed by the reward counseling students gain by prolonged, multiple semester group leader training.

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