An Overview of Group Work and Implications

for School Counselors

by

Zac Schnedler

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
In

Guidance & Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits
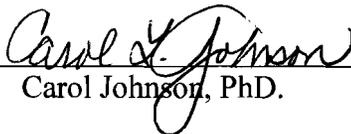
Carol X. Johnson

Carol Johnson, PhD.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

August, 2008

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: Schnedler, Zac

Title: *An Overview of Group Work and Implications for School Counselors*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Guidance & Counseling

Research Adviser: Carol Johnson, Ph.D.

Month/Year: August, 2008

Number of Pages: 30

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

The literature review provides an overview of research pertaining to group work in the school counseling program. Aspects of groups themes, membership and perceived barriers are examined. Literature describing group functions, types of different groups, stages that occur in group work, and how to overcome barriers for school counselors is presented. This literature provides school counselors with insight in choosing themes, balancing membership in groups and how to maintain confidentiality. The research provides promising practices for using groups to maximize the counselor's time. A section outlining ethical and legal considerations when approaching group work is included also.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin Stout

Menomonie, WI

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family for all of their support throughout my graduate

school training. I especially would like to acknowledge my finance, Abby Johnson, for

her love, support, and friendship throughout this journey. My thesis advisor, Carol

Johnson, has helped me in many ways. She has reminded me to keep faith, remain

positive, and to stay focused on completing my thesis. I am thankful for Carol Johnson

and the University of Wisconsin Stout Guidance and Counseling faculty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Many school counselors would acknowledge that their job description is immense, versatile and often elusive. Some school counselors may be perceived as having specialized roles in schools. Depending upon the school or district, a school counselor's responsibilities may adapt to the needs and expectations of the individual school administrator.

School counselors may also have administrative responsibilities contingent upon their job description. For example, in rural school settings a school counselor may take on the responsibilities of doing bus duty or hall duty, filling in for a teacher who is running late, covering for a secretary who is in training for the morning or substituting for the principal in his or her absence. School counselors may need to balance counseling and helping students with their respective needs while satisfying the schools' agenda for administrative duties simultaneously. This may present quite a challenge. While counseling and helping students is of greater interest and importance to many counselors, the additional administrative responsibilities may now become equally important in order to maintain their jobs.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national model suggests three domains of student development: academic, personal/social, and career (ASCA, 2003). There are additional standards that fall under the umbrella of these three domains; however, this study will focus on the strategies to help the school counselor make the best use of time and energy through the use of educational groups in counseling.

School counseling groups are often referred to as psychoeducational "group work." Much of the existing research in the school setting focuses on psychoeducational

type of group counseling. Psychoeducational groups rely on the leader teaching skills rather than facilitating group processing as occurs in mental health counseling groups. Measurable outcomes from participants in counseling groups are often less measurable than outcomes from participants in individual sessions. Psychoeducational groups are sometimes seen as not offering much more than personal growth (Littrell & Zinck, 2000). However, other research illustrates evidence for not only personal growth but also transferable life skills, such as coping, communicating, and decision-making (Hardt & Robison, 1992).

Both psychoeducational and mental health counseling groups have shown success for group member participants and there is a place for these groups in both mental health fields and schools. Quite possibly, there is a need for a blending of the two types of group into a hybrid group that school counselors can use more effectively. Therefore, if both psychoeducational and counseling groups have shown benefits for group members, what does the future hold for blending these groups in the school setting?

Much of school counseling group work occurs in the classroom setting to reach the most students and make the most effective use of the student's and the counselor's time. The recently developed American School Counseling National Model (2003) mission statement and vision for the school counselor provides insight into how groups may benefit the school counseling program.

Currently, there is a pressing need for data-driven results derived from the No Child Left Behind Act and the recent program revision suggested by the ASCA National Model (2003). Schools are under tremendous pressure to yield measurable results of student improvement in each of the three domains of personal/social growth, career

development, and especially academic growth. School counselors share this goal of academic achievement in partnership with other educators including teachers, administrators, and support staff. Do counseling groups contribute to the academic success of students and can the outcomes of the group counseling sessions be documented with data driven results? If so, are counselors keeping track of data to show adequate yearly progress? If not, how can counseling groups modify the group expectations and outcomes to demonstrate evidence of improved academic success?

Another significant factor in public education is wise use of taxpayer money. Combining the purchasing power of several districts may save money on the supplies needed to run the district. Partnering with community agencies and sharing the building with county offices can save money on heat and electricity. This business-model approach to maximizing resources has been introduced to schools and supports the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act regarding getting the most education for the taxpayer's dollar. Therefore, if efficiency is a highly valued commodity can school counseling groups further extend this value by efficiently using counselor time, energy and resources?

Statement of Problem

The concern for effective use of counseling time brings group-work as a strategy that counselors may wish to consider to maximize student contact time and wise use of counseling sessions. Knowing about effective group counseling strategies may enhance the counselor's ability to work more efficiently with a larger population of students. Therefore, the problem is, how can school counselors meet the needs of the majority of students through effective use of group counseling strategies?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this paper is to bring attention to the new American School Counseling Association (ASCA) model for school counselors that involve assisting students in three student-centered domains that include: social/personal, career, and academic. Research was explored to determine ways that counseling groups can be effective in schools and if they are sufficiently meeting the needs of participants while effectively using the resources of the school counseling staff.

Various literature and research articles were reviewed pertaining to effective strategies for counseling groups, the role of groups in school settings and overcoming perceived barriers to successful group work in a school setting. The literature review occurred during the spring and summer of 2008. The purpose of this literature review is to identify strategies that effectively use the counselor's time and expertise while meeting the needs of the students through group counseling sessions.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Explore the current research on the topic of group work for school counselors.

2. Determine what type of group work is most efficient for the school setting.

3. Assess how group-work fits the needs of school counselors and students.

4. Evaluate and reduce perceived barriers to successful school groups.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will appear throughout the study. They are listed here and defined in order to gain more clarity in understanding for the reader.

Group work- Developing curriculum or themes for a designated population of students to work in a group setting.

Psychoeducational Groups- Groups centered around developing skills or attaining goals with the emphasis on learning rather than processing.

High risk population- Students who may have high social or emotional needs and may also be at-risk of dropping out of school.

Assumptions

One assumption of the research is that the literature was readily available and accurately summarized to reflect the content of the articles. It was also assumed that the research reviewed was from scholarly sources.

Limitations

A limitation of this literature review is that although the researcher made an attempt to review a variety of available research on the topic of group work in school counseling, some of the literature may have been overlooked. However, time was a limiting factor in reviewing all of the available resources during the spring and summer of 2008. A final limitation was the focus of group work in itself as just one available strategy to use school counselor time effectively. While there may be many other strategies suggested to counsel students, this literature review was limited to the study of group work in a school counseling setting. Most research involving group work in the school setting is psychoeducational based; however, this literature review evaluates the role of effective group work in a more general sense and how counseling groups fit in the school setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Literature was explored pertaining to group work conducted in the school setting. An overview and definition of group work, types of groups, selecting and screening candidates for groups, stages in group work, common themes of groups and ethical considerations will be addressed in this chapter. Monitoring the effectiveness of groups and seeking ways to avoid barriers to success when conducting group work is included in this chapter. The literature review concludes with research that indicates how group work fits within the new American School Counseling Association vision and purpose for school counselors.

Historical Perspective

School counselors have commonly used counseling groups in school settings. Traditionally, group work has been a core requirement for counselor certification programs. School counselors may have conducted small theme-based groups, taught guidance curriculum to classroom groups and served on task groups to impact the academic outcomes of students. Although school counselors have been involved in some types of group work, the intent of that involvement has now changed (Paisley and Milsom, 2007).

The American School Counseling Association developed a new counseling program model to clarify the roles and expectations for school counselors. The National Model which included the National Standards for counseling was developed in 2002 (ASCA 2003). The National Model recognized a new focus and shift from responsive counseling services to proactive counseling strategies. The focus shifted from the

individual school counselor to the total counseling program of services provided by the counselor as part of the school counseling curriculum. Collaboration with others as part of the pupil service team is also part of the new vision. The ASCA National Model requires that counselors join in the effort to support educational outcomes through student achievement by advocating for students and assisting in removing barriers to student success (Paisley and Milsom, 2007). The ASCA encourages counselors to look for effective strategies to serve all students.

Group Work

"We become group members the instant we are born, and we become members of many groups as our lives unfold" (Kline, 2003, p.1). Groups are seen as a common facet of life. Groups such as family, church, community, school clubs, athletic and academic groups are just a few examples of group membership for typical students.

The definition of a group according to Gladding (2003) is when two or more people meet for interaction based on the purpose of achieving mutually agreed upon goals. Some research pertaining to group work suggests that groups that have certain themes or groups composed of similar populations that define the group purpose are most effective. "The intent, function, and delivery may be substantially different in group work than in other therapy, and may benefit a populace with developmentally appropriate needs" (Delucia-Waack, 2006, p.2). Therefore, group work differs from individual counseling and individual therapy. Individual counseling may be more time-consuming, yet fills an important role in school counseling programs. Some students benefit from individual counseling and consultation and later move into groups when they are deemed ready.

Not all group work is necessarily considered therapy. The role of the school counselor is generally not to conduct intensive, long term therapy, but rather offer appropriate school-based counseling. Group work in a school setting may be small group counseling held in the counseling center or empty classroom, or large group counseling sometimes held in a classroom or auditorium. When working in groups there are dynamics that may arise which essentially make groups different from individual work. For example, the discipline needed in individual counseling sessions is quite rare, but classroom management and discipline in large or medium groups is more common based on the dynamics of the participants. The nature of these dynamics depend upon the leader; leadership style, structure, length of sessions, group members; size of group, population, age, theme, and environment setting. A well-informed counselor may need to know the types of groups recommended for the school setting.

Types of Groups

For the purpose of this study, five common types of groups will be discussed. According to Corey and Cory (2006) groups may be described as the following types: task groups, psychoeducational groups, counseling groups, brief or solutions-focused groups and psychotherapy groups. All five groups will briefly be explored; however, it is noteworthy that not all types of groups may be compatible with the ASCA National Model recommendations for school counseling programs.

Task groups. Task groups are very common in everyday life and permeate all types of jobs, organizations, and industries. The inherent focus of these types of groups is goal-orientated and serves to accomplish certain objectives and identify goals (Corey & Corey, 2006). According to Corey and Corey (2006), noteworthy characteristics in task

groups are; evidence of a clear purpose, value member input, demonstrate appreciation of differences, encourage feedback, and focus on current issues. An example of this type of group would be an advisory group that meets to evaluate the school counseling program, collect data, and make recommendations for change.

Task groups structurally consist of three simple stages: warm-up, action, and closure. Task groups can be very simple or complex and can form as a subgroup within a larger group. The Education Trust (2006) Transforming School Counselor Initiative (TSCI), challenges school counselors to extend their traditional responsibilities and work with other educational professionals, parents, and community agencies, ultimately adding task groups as a central function within the school counselor role (Milsom & Paisley, 2007).

Psychoeducational groups. "Psychoeducational interventions assist group members in sharing and developing coping skills and behaviors to deal with new or difficult situations" (Corey & Corey, 2006, p.3). Psychoeducational groups are the most prevalent groups in the school setting. These groups are more structured than other groups and specifically intend to address certain deficits or improve social competencies in students. They can be both preventative and intervention-based. Sessions are typically around two hours but can be as short as thirty minutes in length. They usually are scheduled once a week and may last for four to six sessions. These groups are considered effective with both children and adolescents.

Psychoeducational group themes have an extensive range and may include groups for stress or anger management, skills for recognizing and coping with eating disorders, and topics for transition and relationship building, according to Corey and Corey (2006).

These groups often include the component of assistance in overcoming issues and building certain behavioral and affective skills. Therefore, the goal of psychoeducational groups is to build skills or overcome deficits. There is an emphasis on teaching and learning in psychoeducational groups. The counselor takes on the role of teacher/facilitator.

Counseling groups. According to the American Society of Group Work (ASGW) small counseling groups serve smaller targeted theme-groups of students on a specific issue related to prevention, remediation, or crisis. An example of a small counseling group theme includes a post-trauma group organized after a school shooting or similar intense crisis. Counseling groups rely on interactive feedback and focus on the here-and-now.

"Counseling groups focus on interpersonal processes and problem-solving strategies that stress thoughts, feelings, and behavior...A counseling group aims at helping participants resolve problems in living or dealing with developmental concerns" (Corey, & Corey, 2006, p.12). Members strive to understand interpersonal problems and actively look to remove the barriers that prevent optimal development. Members often develop interpersonal skills that assist in coping with the present crisis. These groups characterize techniques of supporting fellow group members with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Other small group themes may explore personal growth and honest self-exploration. The structure of these groups can be open (members decide) or focused (leader decides). According to Corey and Corey (2006), common group themes may

include: interpersonal skill development, behavior plans for change, study skills, coping skills, and diversity awareness and appreciation.

The focus of these groups is more on the process rather than content. Therefore, the focus of counseling groups is essentially very different than of psychoeducational groups. Goals are also more personal rather than group-oriented. Group leaders structure activities that elicit the here-and-now, model appropriate behaviors, and promote self-exploration and self-reflection. Rather than teaching and giving content as the counselor does in the psychoeducational group, the counselor plays a passive facilitative role and the group members share and learn from the experience of other members.

Psychotherapy groups. Psychotherapy groups were developed in part due to the shortage of individual therapy counselors during World War II (Corey & Corey, 2006). Generally, psychotherapy groups fall under the realm of mental health therapy rather than school counseling due to the intensity of the issue covered in psychotherapy. These groups promote member exchanges to bring about change in their lives over time. This sort of interaction allows for support, caring, confrontation, and other techniques that are not always possible in short-term school counseling sessions. The goal is to remediate psychological problems. Group members may have acute or chronic mental or emotional disorders that impair functioning. These groups connect present behavior to historical material to assess, interpret, and diagnose. According to Corey and Corey (2006), types of psychological problems addressed in psychotherapy mental health groups may include but not be limited to: depression, post-traumatic stress, sexual issues, severe eating disorders, and anxiety.

Group psychotherapy leaders may work with symbolic techniques and the unconscious thought processes. These groups generally require more time and sessions than other groups previously mentioned that may be more appropriate for school settings. These groups are to be lead by certified therapists who may offer specialization in these areas. When school counselors encounter these issues, it is wise to consult and refer the family to seek community based counseling for best outcomes.

Brief groups. The final type of group described is brief group, as these groups derive their name from their limited time structure. A brief group is a structured group with defined focus, specific purpose and designated number of sessions. Examples of brief groups include: test-prep group, grief group, new student group, or career exploration group.

These groups generally meet from four to twelve sessions. The sessions are very structured with planned objectives prior to starting session. Students with similar issues such as exploring career exploration, being new to the school, or coping with learning disabilities may benefit from brief group sessions. These groups have become very popular due to their cost-effectiveness and time-effectiveness format. Research shows that brief groups can be beneficial and usually use Behavioral or Cognitive-Behavioral approaches (Garner & LaFountain, 1996). The format of brief groups is appealing to overworked school counselors and allows for opportunity to facilitate more groups with more students over time.

Group Membership

Once group themes and purposes are established, the school counselor must use the leadership skills developed to promote and advertise the group topics and then recruit

students. "Absent from the literature, however, are descriptions and evaluations of methods with which to identify and recruit regular education students for group counseling interventions in an efficient manner" (Sullivan, 2002, p.366).

More popular methods for group membership are sending memos to teachers asking for referrals and posting information about groups on bulletin boards to generate student self-referrals. School counseling website postings and letters to parents promoting group topic themes may increase participation in school groups also. However, these approaches are not always the most effective. According to Sullivan (2002), a more collaborative interactive approach between teachers and counselors is more effective, efficient, and allows for more accurate placement into appropriate groups. Research also suggests that school counselors cite lack of time as the major barrier to implementation of group counseling interventions.

Parents and teachers are most likely to observe student behavior on a daily basis. Therefore, they are great resources for finding students who may benefit from group counseling interventions. Collaboration between parents, teachers and counselors through school meetings and evaluation or referral forms remain a well-accepted method of placing students in appropriate effective groups. Both teachers and counselors have cited collaborative meetings as the future method for counseling group referral (Sullivan, 2002). Once parents, teachers and counselors decide that a student may be a good fit for a particular group, they may simply ask the student or suggest group membership for parental approval.

In addition to self-referral, parent recommendation, or teacher referral, Brigman and Webb (2007), suggest another way for targeting group participants using test scores.

In the Student Success Skills (SSS): Group Intervention Study, participants were targeted based on their percentile scores on a standardized test. The study used the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to target participants scoring between the 25th and 60th percentile in reading. This study yielded promising results, indicating that 78 percent of participants improved their FCAT reading scores on an average of 25 scale points. Selecting members who are most likely to benefit from the themed school groups contributes to the success of the group process. Group membership will be further addressed in the barriers to effective small group work section.

Theme- Based and Population- Based Groups

Research suggests that group work is more effective with certain populations of students and with certain themes. Small groups typically associate with a specific population, theme, or both. The specific population can be dependent upon the referral process. If the theme is usually associated with the referral process, the counselor may issue an invitation for a student to join. Students with low self-esteem, childhood obesity, or students with poor social skills may not readily claim the label and sign up for a group. A private invitation from the counselor may reduce the anxiety level, develop trust, and maintain privacy for a student with special confidential issues.

Most schools have some specific theme groups as mentioned previously. However, some schools have more prevalent issues resulting in needs for groups pertaining to anger management, families in transition, and bullying. If high teen pregnancy rates, multiple suicides, or increases in family military deployment or relocation are common to the school or community, additional special interest themed-groups may be necessary to fit the needs of the community.

Counseling Groups for Specific Populations

While counselors identify the most requested themes appropriate for the school or community, counselors also need to be aware of research that indicates there are certain populations that seem to benefit from school counseling groups. Children with families in transition, adoptees, at-risk students, transient students, and groups for students being retained at grade level are a few special populations that surfaced in the literature review.

According to Littrell and Zinck (2000), counseling groups are generally very effective with female at-risk students. In their study, the majority of female participants reported a significant reduction in problem severity upon termination of the themed counseling groups. In addition, female participants expressed meaningful changes that occurred in personal attitudes and in their relationships with other people. More important, these significant changes made during group counseling tend to endure beyond termination.

Group counseling is also seen as the most practical, effective, and efficient method of intervention for students of divorced families (Yaumen, 1991). Erwin and Toth (2000) suggest divorce-themed counseling groups seems to reduce feelings of isolation and shame while providing peer validation and appropriate peer modeling. Yaumen (1991) also points out the significance of emphasizing the positive benefits that can come from families experiencing divorce while facilitating small groups.

Kizner (1999) states that small counseling groups for adopted children can be effective. Usually by middle school, adopted children are asking questions in regard to birth parents and adoption history. Kizner suggests facilitating adoption-themed small groups early in the elementary school grades may allow student adoptees to associate

with others who were adopted. This would always include parent permission and input. The research by Kizner (1999) points out the significance of remaining proactive as a school counselor by cooperating and working with the family to address important issues early in a students' life rather than later.

Kaffenberger (2007) suggests that both academic interventions and personal/social issues can be combined in psychoeducational groups at the elementary level. The personal/social issues were dependent upon the students and their selection process. Themed-groups set up to address the personal/social objectives of students may include divorce, anger-management, making and maintaining friendships, grief groups, and support for students with parents who have critical illness, injury or disability.

Bowman and Campbell (1993), suggest that small groups based on academic retention can be effective by providing emotional support to students. Their research also indicated that retention does not necessarily improve academic achievement over time. Small group counseling may be an effective approach for students in jeopardy of being retained by grade level. Through small groups, students may gain acceptance from others in similar situation, gain self-esteem, and reframe retention in a positive light, learn to cope, and become motivated for success in following years. It is noteworthy to include that retention in the elementary years can have lasting negative effects on students especially if emotional support and self-esteem are not addressed (Bowman & Campbell, 1993).

The goals for meeting academic objectives, based on the National Standards for School Counseling Programs are to improve academics, develop self-concept, acquire skills for improved learning, achieve overall school success, relate school-to-life experience, and to

take responsibility for actions (Kaffenberger, 2007). Some of these academic objectives were met by focusing on student behavior such as attending class, completing assignments, and participating in class by raising their hand to ask questions.

There is so much emphasis on academic achievement for schools, that it is imperative for school counselors to develop academic interventions for educational groups. School counselors can remain efficient, effective, and still be accountable for their counseling programs while advocating for students' needs and supporting the schools' focus on academics and adequate yearly progress.

There have been effective small counseling groups in school settings among many different student populations with general themes. The literature reviewed implies that group counseling in the school setting is an effective method for school counselors. It can reach diverse populations, service student needs, and use counseling time wisely.

Stages in the Counseling Groups

There are varying opinions on specific stages that groups move through in school group work. However, most of the research on developmental stages for groups is specific to counseling groups rather than group work. Therefore, this section will address the general stages in school counseling groups. According to Corey & Corey (2006), there are four general stages to counseling groups: initial, transition, working, and final.

According to Corey and Corey (2006) the initial stage of group work includes discussing of functions of a group, here-and-now focus, trust issues, group norms, and group rules. School counselors establish trust, set group rules, develop strategies for confidentiality, and gather needed permission slips if required. The initial stage establishes the foundation for a successful group in a school setting.

As the group develops trust and a comfort level in sharing information and giving feedback the group progresses into the next stage called the transition stage. This stage suggests movement into accepting group norms, developing routines and accomplishing the task at hand. The transition stage may include: member anxiety, defensiveness, resistance, conflict, challenging of leader or group members, monopolistic behavior, pseudo-support, dependency, socializing, intellectualizing, and questioning. As the group develops an identity, students may play roles in the group as they go through the stages of group development in a school environment. The leader needs to utilize skill to maintain the integrity of the group and keep members on track, according to Corey and Corey (2006).

As the group settles in to work on goals, develop coping strategies, and apply what is being learned, the working stage is coming together. The working stage may include combinations of group involvement, commitment, disclosure, honesty, acceptance, feedback, group cohesion, trust, and genuine caring. Corey and Corey (2006) indicate that this may be the stage of the most critical growth. As students engage in dialog, set goals, build trust, and move forward, the school counselor may document data to show pre and post group feedback indicating change in feelings and behavior.

The final stage is closure and may include: processing growth, dealing with feelings, preparing for separation, homework, and follow-up interviews. As the group has moved through the stages, the members are ready to leave group and practice their skills in their own lives. The stages in counseling groups may not always happen sequentially, as it is common for groups to move back and forth between stages (Corey & Corey, 2006).

Ethical and Legal Considerations with Counseling Groups

Most of the ethical and legal considerations are derived from the ACA (American Counseling Association), APA (American Psychology Association), and the ASCA (American School Counselor Association) Ethical and legal considerations will be discussed that are most likely pertinent to a school counselor's role. There are two main considerations for the counselor when leading groups in the school setting: informed consent and confidentiality.

Informed consent When a school counselor decides to run a counseling group, informed consent should be gathered from the group members. In psychoeducational groups this may not be emphasized enough due to the structure of the group (Delucia-Waack, 2006). Informed consent consists of leaders informing group members about the process of groups, member rights and responsibilities, receiving documented signature of approval to participate in groups by parents/guardians, and explanation of confidentiality and disclosure (Corey & Corey, 2006).

It is often unclear whether parents should be notified prior to student counseling sessions. For example, the group theme may include divorce or single parent issues. Parents are sometimes uncomfortable giving consent to the schools to discuss these very private issues. However, parent communication is important and it is a necessary safeguard to notify parents seeking permission for their child's participation in groups. Although certain details shared in group or specific comments mentioned by students do not always need to be communicated to parents.

Counselors are mandated reporters and would consult and report information shared that indicates physical or emotional harm or suspected child abuse. By

establishing counseling agreements prior to the sessions, a counselor may seek

permission, establish mandated reporting and confidentially ground rules, outline the

intent and length of the group, and reduce student, parent or administrator concerns.

Confidentiality It is imperative to discuss confidentiality in the school group

sessions. Confidentiality is a very important element in group work, as it allows for

honest processing and reflecting. The ACA (American Counseling Association), section

B.2.a, states the following:

> In group work, counselors clearly define confidentiality and the parameters of the
>
> specific group being entered, explain its importance, and discuss the difficulties
>
> related to confidentiality involved in group work. The fact that confidentiality
>
> cannot be guaranteed is clearly communicated to group members (Corey &
>
> Corey, 2006, p.72)

Group leaders also have an ethical and legal responsibility of informing group members

of the consequences of breaching confidentiality. Therefore, school counselors must

communicate to group members that "what is talked about in here, stays in here." School

counselors must also inform members when they are legally responsible to breach

confidentiality. Counselors may consider breaching confidentiality for: self harm, harm to

others, imminent danger, and neglect or sexual abuse. It is very important to consider

how and when the message of confidentiality is addressed and to be wary of breaches of

confidentiality by group members.

In one study of counseling groups conducted in a school setting, 24 of 57 group

members breached confidentiality to inform a family member or friend of information

related during their group time even when confidentiality was specifically addressed with

the group prior to the first session (Davis, 1980). Therefore, it is imperative the counselor spends adequate time when dealing with confidentiality issues in school counseling groups and establish appropriate consequences for those who choose not to follow the guidelines agreed upon by members.

Barriers to Effective Small Group Work

With the school counselor's best intentions, some groups may encounter obstacles to success. These barriers will be addressed to assist the counselor with proactive strategies to enhance counseling in small educational groups.

According to McWhirter (1999), a psychoeducational group intervention working with a high-risk anger management population was not found to be effective in school settings due to the limited time constraints. McWhirter states that the time commitment or format of sessions can also be a significant barrier to success in facilitating groups with high-risk students. Therefore, high-risk students may not be the best candidates for brief school counseling groups. Counselors may wish to screen group members and determine if high-risk students may benefit from outside community-based counseling that could be long term and of higher intensity than the school day allows.

Dagley (1999) suggests that career interventions are effective through either psychoeducational theme groups or school counseling small groups. "An analysis of the professional literature leads to a strong conclusion that career counseling group leaders have not trusted group process as much as they have group content" (Dagley, 1999). Dagley introduces structured groups as a hybrid of both psychoeducational and small counseling groups. He suggested that small groups do not always fit into a specific

category and may be more effective by possessing a mixture of typologies and techniques.

Dagley (1999) also questions the lack of group counseling theory, preparation, and experiences in graduate programs that are consequently leading to less research on relevant career counseling groups, specifically involving process over content. Counselors may wish to keep current on group leadership skills and read literature, attend conferences, and consult with other professionals in the field to reduce barriers to successful group counseling in the school setting. It is important to note that not all small group experiences have been found to be effective. It is also important to be cognizant of high-risk or high-need populations and also be wary of time constraints when dealing with these populations.

Akos, Dunaway, Hamm & Mack (2007) suggest that school counselors must be aware of peer dynamics when facilitating group work. Early adolescents may use social aggression to attain or reinforce their beliefs, affiliation, and social status. Adolescents may form groups within the larger group and put down others in the form of gossip, teasing, bullying, and overall exclusion. This barrier to successful group counseling can undermine the efforts of the school counselor.

Another important aspect for consideration is the size and composition of the group, age and maturity level and the group dynamics of the participating members. Akos, Dunaway, Hamm & Mack (2007) and Brigman & Webb (2007) found mixing anti-social and pro-social group participants to balance the overriding group dynamic and provide more learning opportunities. Researchers including Brigman & Webb (2007) and Akos, Dunaway, Hamm & Mack (2007) believe that forming theme groups such as

anger management groups with adolescents who are more prone to have anti-social behaviors may reinforce their attitudes and beliefs. For example, if the majority of group members feel alienated from school partake in rebellious activity, the group may take on this identity and only reinforce these ideas, beliefs, and attitudes.

Brigman & Webb (2007) further recommends selecting a balanced group based on teachers' feedback on several aspects including social skills, academic needs, and self-management. Potential barriers in group work start when a school counselor decides who to include when forming a themed-group. Therefore, careful consideration and consultation with others is recommended.

Akos, Dunaway, Hamm & Mack. (2007) emphasize that school counselors must be explicit when introducing group rules and establishing norms. Counselors need to face the possibility of group conflict. Early adolescents are developing argumentativeness skills and school counselors have to be able to address conflict within the group by discussing and observing arguments based on evidence, not hypothetical situations. It is important for the group facilitator to establish control of the group initially rather than hoping to attain in later on. In conclusion, group facilitators should be aware of selection of group members and the dynamics that will form within the group setting and be clear and concise when setting the parameters of group work.

Counselors have many tasks to prepare for setting up school groups. Selecting themes, choosing participants, establishing ground rules, gathering permission, and maintaining confidentiality can all contribute to the foundation for a successfully maintained group in the school setting.

Chapter III: Summary and Recommendations

Summary

School counselors have very busy schedules. An efficient and effective method of reaching many students is through counseling groups in the school setting. The American School Counseling National Model for reform of the school counseling program includes recommendations to include small group counseling sessions and large group classroom session as a strategy to reach more students. With emphasis on adequate yearly progress, counselors may play a contributing role in student academic success.

A group is sometimes defined as two or more people coming together with a common interest. School counseling groups may help students develop skills to succeed in the classroom. There are five types of groups that may facilitate student growth and achievement. They include: task groups, psychoeducational groups, counseling groups, brief groups and psychotherapy groups. While all groups have value, the wise counselor will select the appropriate type of group, themes, and members that best fit the needs of the students.

Stages that many groups cycle through include the initial, transition, working, and final stage. It is necessary for group facilitators to have awareness of the stages and create goals, themes, and closure activities that are age-appropriate. Counseling group leaders also need to monitor progress of groups as they move through the stages.

Group facilitators have certain ethical standards to adhere to regardless of the setting. The main ethical considerations to be wary of are informed consent and confidentiality. Communication with staff, administrators, and parents may assure all are informed about the group topics, lengths and dates of sessions, and expectations of group

members. Obtaining permission for counseling in writing may help counselors avoid barriers to successful counseling sessions. Addressing the ground rules for counseling groups can allow members to fully benefit from participation.

Much research pertaining to group work supports choosing certain themes or group populations that generally define the group. Group facilitators also have to be developmentally appropriate in the material they cover and in the processing techniques. The research further suggests that group work has many facets and that group facilitators should be trained before taking on such responsibility. Equally important is the challenge for many counselors to create balance with the peer dynamics within a themed group. The current research offers some logical ideas for forming group membership by utilizing teacher's feedback, strength inventories, and personal observation or experience with potential group members.

Finally, many of the barriers to running successful groups in the school setting can be addressed proactively. Screening candidates, communication with parents, balancing membership in groups, establishing trust, expectations, and confidential boundaries, and referring high-risk students to outside community resources may help eliminate many of the perceived barriers to well-run and productive groups.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research regarding this topic may include collecting data on themes used in school counseling groups by practicing counselors at a variety of schools. Using survey feedback from counselors may help future researchers finding out what types of groups and themes are popular among school counselors, and how much time school counselors feel they use in group work with students. Successful group

formats that are flexible for school counselors could be shared with further researchers in this area. Finally, asking school counselors what type of training they had to prepare them for conducting groups would enable future researchers to set up training or workshops based on the input.

References

Akos, P., Dunaway, M., Hamm, J.V., & Mack, S.G. (2007) Utilizing the developmental

   Influence of peers in middle school groups. *Journal for Specialist in Group*

   Work, 32(1), 51-60. Retrieved July 10, 2008 from EBSCOhost Academic Search

   Elite.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2003). *The ASCA National Model:*

   A framework for school counseling programs. Alexandria, VA.

Bond, L., Morran, K.D., & Stockton R. (1991). Delivery of positive and corrective

   feedback in counseling groups. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 38*(4), 410-

   414. Retrieved November 7, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycARTICLES.

Brigman, G.A., & Webb, L. (2007). Student success skills: a structured group

   intervention for school counselors. *Journal of Action Methods, 51*(4), 141-158.

   Retrieved July 10, 2007 from : EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite

Corey, G, & Corey M.S. (Eds.; 2006). *Groups Process and Practice.* Thomson

   Books/Cole.

Dagley, J.C. (1999). The restoration of group process in career counseling groups.

   International Journal of Action Methods, 51(4), 141-158. Retrieved November

   10th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite.

Davis, K. L. (1980). Is confidentiality in group counseling realistic? *Personnel &*

   Guidance Journal, 59(4), 197-201. Retrieved November 7, 2006, from:

   EBSCOhost PsycINFO.

Delucia-Waack, J.L. (2006). *Leading psychoeducational groups for children and Adolescents.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Erwin, W. J., & Toth, P. L. (1998). Applying skill-based curriculum to teach feedback in groups: An evaluation study. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 76*(3), 8. Retrieved November 7th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite.

Garner, S. E., & Mawson, D.L. (1996). Solution-focused counseling groups: A key for school counselors. *School Counselor, 43*(4), 256-266. Retrieved November 7th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite.

Gladding, S.T. (2003). *Group work a counseling specialty.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Hammond, J. M. (1981). Loss of the family unit: counseling groups to help kids. *Personnel & Guidance Journal, 59*(6), 392-394. Retrieved November 10th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycINFO.

Hardt, D.A., & Robison, F.F. (1992). Effects of cognitive and behavioral structure and discussion of corrective feedback outcomes on counseling group development. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 39*(4), 473-481. Retrieved November 7th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycARTICLES.

Jepsen, D.A., & Warner, S.G. (1979). Differential effects of conceptual level and group format on adolescent career decision-making process. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 26*(6), 497-503. Retrieved November 7th, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycINFO.

Kline, W.B. (2003). *Interactive group counseling and therapy.* Upper Saddle River, New

Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Littrell, J.M., & Zinck, K. (2000). Action research shows group counseling effective

with at-risk adolescent girls. *Professional School Counseling, 4(*1), 50-59.

Retrieved November 7, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycINFO.

McWhiter, B.T. (1999). Effects of anger management and goal setting group

interventions on state-trait anger and self-efficacy beliefs among high risk

adolescents. *Current Psychology, 18*(2), 223-238. Retrieved November 18th,

2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycARTICLES.

Milsom, A., & Paisley, P.O. (2007). Group work as an essential contribution to

Transforming school counseling. *Journal for specialists in Group Work, 32*(1),

9-17. Retrieved July 10, EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite.

Morran, K.D., & Stockton, R.A. (1980). Effect of self-concept on group member

reception of positive and negative feedback. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,*

27(3), 260-267. Retrieved November 10, 2006, from: EBSCOhost PsycINFO..

Shechtman, Z., & Yanov, H. (2001). Interpretives (confrontation, interpretation, and

feedback) in preadolescent counseling groups. *Group Dynamics: Theory,*

Research, and Practice, 5(2), 124-135. Retrieved November 7th, 2006, from:

EBSCOhost PsycARTICLES.

Sullivan, J.R., & Wright, N. (2002). The collaborative group counseling referral process:

description and teacher evaluation. *Professional School Counseling, 5*(5), 366-

368. Retrieved November 7, from: EBSCOhost PsycINFO.

The Education Trust. (2006). *Scope of the work.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved

November 10, 2007 from www2.edtrust.org

Yaumen, B.E. (1991). School-based group counseling for children of divorce: A review

of the literature. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 26*(2), 130-139.

Retrieved November 10, 2006, from: EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite.