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Group Counseling Courses in CACREP-accredited Programs: A National Survey

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Group Counseling Courses in CACREP-accredited Programs: A National Survey

Abstract

We surveyed 113 counselor educators to understand the structure of group counseling courses in CACREP-accredited programs and their self-reflections of teaching group counseling courses. Our focus included instructor characteristics, course content (didactic versus experiential), evaluation (content knowledge versus hands-on skills), supervision, and teaching strategies. The responses were a heterogeneous composition of instructor background, program structure, curriculum, and the setup of the experiential component. The comparison with the literature indicates a slight change, mainly in the use of technology and the experiential component, over the past decade. Based on the results, we identified the needs for future studies and made suggestions for counselor education programs and educators.

Keywords

group counseling training; experiential groups; counselor education

As one of the treatment modalities in psychotherapy, group counseling has received attention for its potential to increase efficiency and bring down the cost of mental health care (Corey, 2014). Moreover, group work has been proved to be effective across populations (Barlow, 2008; Burlingam et al., 2002). The importance of group counseling is reflected in the training standards of counseling organizations. For example, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in its accreditation standards lists group counseling as one of the eight core areas in entry-level counseling programs (CACREP, 2015). Accordingly, students in CACREP-accredited master's programs are expected to be equipped with group counseling theoretical foundations, group dynamics, therapeutic factors, characteristics of group leaders, group formation, types of groups, and group-related ethical and cultural considerations. Furthermore, CACREP (2015) also requires students to have "direct experiences in which students participate as group members in a small group activity, approved by the program, for a minimum of 10 clock hours over the course of one academic term" (II.F.6.h, p.12), which is often demonstrated by an experiential group format in the group counseling course.

Similarly, the Association for the Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) released the Professional Standards for Training Group Workers in 2000 to provide guidance for counselor training programs in the construction of their group counseling curriculum. The 15-page document details the essential components of core training and specialist training in group work. In both the core and specialization guidelines, the standards list the recommended coursework and experience, knowledge and skill elements, planning group interventions, implementation of group interventions, leadership, evaluation, and ethical and cultural practices (ASGW, 2000). It is worth noting that the standards also list the experiential group, "a minimum of 10 clock hours (20 clock hours recommended)

observation of and participation in a group experience as a group member and/or as a group leader” (p. 5), as part of the core training (ASGW, 2000).

Group Counseling Training

The above training standards and the literature demonstrate group counseling training being an integral component of counselor education (CACREP, 2015). For example, researchers have discussed the four common effective elements in group counseling training being experiential, supervision, observation, and academic (Barlow, 2004; Ohrt et al., 2014). They argued that group counselors have to experience the full force of a group to become an effective group counselor (Barlow, 2004). Specifically, group counselors need to grasp the foundation in group theories, observe and learn group skills, participate in an experiential group, and practice leading or co-leading group work (Furr & Barret, 2000). Moreover, students need to be exposed to both group psychology and psychotherapy literature, including change theories, group process, group leader roles, group member roles, and group structures (Barlow, 2004). Incorporating observation of video recordings from group experts was also recommended to help students understand group work (Barlow, 2004). Instructors may use modeling of the techniques and skills to facilitate groups in the classroom ethically to help students capture group leadership skills (Riva & Korinek, 2004). Researchers also suggested integrating movies or television media in the group class to help students understand group work (Gary & Grady, 2015; Moe et al., 2014). A few researchers developed specific strategies or models for group counseling training (Bailey & O’Keefe, 2013; Downing et al., 2001; Schaeffle et al., 2005; Smaby et al., 1999; Zimmick et al., 2000).

Bailey and O’Keefe (2013) advocated using a developmental humanistic approach as the foundation of group counseling training. They suggested group counseling instructors foster a personal connection and mutual construction of knowledge with

students and model the role of the group leader, such as disclosing their sense of humanity. Similarly, a few authors developed a Group Counseling Scale and Related Model (SGCTM) to promote skills training in group work (Downing et al., 2001; Schaeffle et al., 2005; Smaby et al., 1999; Zimmick et al., 2000). There are three stages in the model (a) exploring, the initial stage where a group identifies problems, (b) understanding, the middle stage when group members agree on what they want to accomplish, and (c) acting, the stage when the group members act to achieve their goals. For each stage, the model identifies a) a purpose, (b) two counseling processes, and (c) six counseling skills (low level and high-level skills). The results of two empirical studies (Downing et al., 2001; Smaby et al., 1999) indicated that the model was effective in training group counseling skills such as their attending and empathy skills.

In addition, researchers have found that the courses have a heavy emphasis on group counseling knowledge instead of skills (Conyne et al., 1993; Vannatta & Steen, 2019). The phenomenon was reflected in a national survey of group counselors where 85% of master's students demonstrated knowledge competence while only 2% demonstrated skill competencies (Conyne et al., 1993). Similarly, Vannatta and Steen (2019) conducted content analyses with the group counseling course syllabuses from 24 CACREP-accredited counseling programs. They found that those courses tended to (a) focus on group counseling knowledge rather than leadership skills, (b) utilize didactic and experiential activities as methods of instruction, and (c) evaluate students with written assignments. Furthermore, one significant problem in group counseling courses was the lack of emphasis on developing group leadership skills (Vannatta & Steen, 2019), which could be fostered via experiential group opportunities (Zhu, 2018).

Experiential Groups in Group Counseling Training

According to training standards (ASGW, 2000; CACREP, 2015), the experiential

group is an essential component of group counseling courses. Moreover, it is typically incorporated as a part of the group counseling course (Zhu, 2018) to meet the CACREP standards that require students to have at least 10 hours of group experience as group members or leaders (CACREP, 2015). The instructors in those courses can have different levels of involvement in these experiential group activities: (1) no experiential group, (2) experiential groups without feedback, (3) experiential groups with feedback, (4) instructor-observed groups, and (5) instructor-led groups (Merta et al., 1993; Shumaker et al., 2011). The experiential groups with or without feedback were categorized as instructor-free groups in which the instructor would not observe or lead the experiential groups. The instructor-led or observed experiential groups were either led or observed by instructors (Merta et al., 1993). Among these models, the instructor-led experiential group reportedly was the most commonly used one (Shumaker et al., 2011; St.Pierre, 2014). Each type of experiential group has benefits and concerns. For instance, the instructor-led experiential group may raise some ethical problems such as dual-relationships (Shumaker et al., 2011), where students reported feeling uncomfortable in participating in the group facilitated by the instructors (Ieva et al., 2009; St. Pierre, 2014).

Due to its complexity, the topic of experiential group is the most common in group counseling training literature. Researchers have examined the ethical concerns (Shumaker et al., 2011), alternatives to experiential groups (Pistole & Filer, 1991; Romano, 1998), student outcomes by different types of the group (Ieva et al., 2009; Ohrt et al., 2013), and approaches to facilitate experiential groups (Bourgeois et al., 2016; Laux et al., 2007; Topuz & Arasan, 2014; Webster & Spellings, 2016). Some of the literature also suggested new experiential training models replace the one in class (Bjornestad et al., 2016; Carty, 1991; Choi & Protivnak, 2016; Keim et al., 2015; Kew, 1965; Lambert & Goodman-Scott, 2013), which provide students the opportunities to experience leading or co-leading

groups without self-disclosure.

Nearly three decades ago, Merta et al. (1993) surveyed 272 counseling programs using a questionnaire that focused on group counseling instructors, course structure, pedagogical methods, ethical and professional concerns, and the use of experiential groups. The authors reported the results that focused on the following types of experiential groups: “no group” (12%), “no feedback group” (8%), “feedback group” (19%), “instructor-observed group” (22%), and “instructor-led group” (39%). The safeguards used to protect students’ participation were also reported: voluntary participation, providing informed consent before attending groups, limiting self-disclosure, and not evaluating experiential group participation (Merta et al., 1993).

As a follow-up study, Shumaker et al. (2011) surveyed 82 counseling programs to update the information of the use of experiential groups, perceived ethical/professional concerns, and self-report perception of the experiential groups, from November 2008 to April 2009. They found that the percentages of the programs with no experiential group component were similar in both studies (9% vs. 12%), and the “instructor-led group” was the most common group in both studies. Furthermore, a small portion (5%) of the sample reported the use of the alternatives to the experiential group, as discussed in the literature (e.g., Keim et al., 2015). The authors also identified a trend of the increased use of safeguards as compared to the results in Merta et al. (1993). Lastly, participants identified problematic group experiences and outcomes, such as lack of skill proficiency, attendance, and perceived student violation of confidentiality (Shumaker et al., 2011).

Given the rapidly growing counseling profession and Shumaker et al.’s (2011) study was conducted more than a decade ago, there is a need to update such information reported in these two studies. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature on the common structure to deliver group counseling courses (Vannatta & Steen, 2019). As group counseling- a core

component in the training standards gains attention for its effectiveness, it is imperative for counselor educators to become aware of the trends and options in group counseling training. Therefore, we intended to investigate the common structure of group counseling courses and the experiential groups in those courses. However, this is not a replication study of the previous two studies as we also invited group counseling instructors to reflect on their teaching experience, self-efficacy, and teaching strategies. The research questions in this exploratory survey study were:

- (1) what is the course structure of the group counseling course in counselor education nowadays?
 - a. What are the common teaching modalities, components, and evaluations of group counseling courses nowadays?
 - b. How do group counseling instructors incorporate experiential groups in their group counseling courses?
- (2) How do group counseling instructors reflect on their teaching of group counseling courses?
 - a. Does their self-efficacy of teaching group counseling correlate with the years of teaching and clinical experience?
 - b. What are the recommendations for other counselor educators?

Method

Instrument

First, the first author formed the survey questions by drawing from the previous literature (Merta et al.,1993; Shumaker et al., 2011). The second author, who has expertise in survey design, helped with the wording and formats. Afterward, we invited a colleague who has taught group counseling courses for more than 10 years to test the initial survey and provide feedback to improve the clarity of the questions and the structure of the

survey. As a result, we finalized the questionnaire that included three main sections: demographic information, teaching structure, and self-reflections of teaching group counseling courses. The demographic section consisted of items relevant to the background of the institutions and the participants (e.g., clinical and teaching experiences). The main section of the questionnaire focused on their group counseling course structure, such as the delivery methods (e.g., in-person versus online), the number of class hours, the typical class size, the materials used for teaching, and evaluation and supervision methods. There was also a subsection, if participants indicated the use of experiential groups, for details like the location, types, and leadership of their experiential group. Lastly, the self-reflection questions included a question to indicate their self-efficacy of teaching group counseling courses on a scale from 1 to 5 and open-ended questions such as the strategies of teaching group counseling and suggestions to future colleagues who may teach group counseling courses.

Procedure

The population for this study was comprised of instructors teaching group counseling related courses in all CACREP-accredited programs in 2019 and 2020. The selecting criteria were that 1) they were older than 18 years old; and 2) they have taught group counseling or related courses in CACREP-accredited programs. The authors collected the email addresses of these instructors by visiting the websites of CACREP accredited programs ($N = 414$; CACREP, 2019). Specifically, we searched the group counseling courses on the course offering website of each program. With the instructors' names listed on the website, we got their email addresses either from the course offering website or on the faculty website. Following the approval by the Institutional Review Board, three rounds of recruitment emails were sent out to potential participants that could be reached ($N = 253$) from March to May 2020. A total of 113 participants fully completed

the survey (response rate = 44.66%).

Data Analysis

We first used SPSS 14.0 to conduct descriptive analysis to capture the common structures of group counseling courses (the first research question). For the second research question, we used correlational analysis to measure the relationship between their self-efficacy and years of teaching and clinical experience. For the open-ended questions, we used MaxQDA to analyze the responses using an open-coding process recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). We segmented the responses into two main categories (instructor-related and course- structure-related).

Participants

Among 113 participants who have completed the survey, there were 21 (18.6%) participants from the North Atlantic region, 28 (24.8%) from the North Central region, 47 (41.6%) from the Southern region, and 17 (15%) from the Western region based on the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions (ACES, n.d.). As for the specialty areas in their institutions, 11 (9.73%) participants indicated having only clinical mental health counseling (CMHC), five (4.4%) had only school counseling (SC), 29 (25.7%) had both CMHC and SC, 12 (10.6%) consisted of CMHC, SC, and a doctoral program in counselor education and supervision, 30 (26.6%) had CMHC, SC, and other specialty areas (e.g., rehabilitation counseling), and 14 (12.4%) were in “others” category (e.g., career counseling and college counseling). The participants were also asked for the number of years since they became eligible for a counseling license or certificate. One reported “0” and one indicated the license being lapse, while the rest were distributed in the sub-groups: “1-5 years” (19.5%), “6-10 years” (23.0%), “11-15 years” (23.9%), “16-20 years” (10.6%), and “more than 20 years” (21.2%). They also indicated various experiences in teaching group counseling courses – 58 participants (51.3%) had taught group counseling course “1 - 5 times”, 20 (17.7 %) indicated “6 to 10 times”, 9 (8.0%) were “11 - 15 times”, 5

(4.4%) were “16 - 20 times”, and 21 (18.6%) taught “more than 20 times”. The demographic information can be found in table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Category	Distribution (N = 113)
ACES region	North Atlantic (18.6%)
	North Central (24.8%)
	Southern (41.6%)
	Western (15.0%)
Specialty Areas	CMHC (9.73%)
	SC (4.4%)
	MHC & SC (25.7%)
	CMHC, SC & CES (10.6%)
	CMHC, SC, & Others (26.6%)
	Others (12.4%)
Number of Years Since License Eligible	1-5 Years (19.5%)
	6-10 Years (23.0%)
Group Counseling Teaching Experience	11-15 Years (23.9%)
	16-20 Years (10.6%)
	More Than 20 Years (21.2%)
	1-5 Times (51.3%)
	6-10 Times (17.7%)
	11-15 Times (8.0%)
	16-20 Times (4.4%)
	More than 20 Times (18.6%)

Note: CMHC: Clinical Mental Health Counseling; SC: School Counseling; CES = Counselor Education and Supervision (doctoral)

Results

Program/Course Curriculum

Majority of the institutions offered one group counseling course ($n = 84$; 74.3%), while some offered two group counseling related courses ($n = 26$; 23.0%), and a few offered three or more ($n = 3$; 2.7%; Table 2). Some participants shared their curricula, such as “group counseling, advanced group counseling,” and “one at the masters, one at the doctoral.” Moreover, in-person teaching was reported as the most common modality to deliver their group counseling courses ($n = 92$; 81.4%), some offered a hybrid group class ($n = 18$; 15.9%), and only a very few participants offered the courses via a purely online format ($n = 3$; 2.7%) (Table 2).

For the introductory group counseling course, the weekly class hours ranged from 1.5 hours to 5 hours, with an average of 3.25 hours per week. The most frequent weekly class hours were 2.5 to 3 hours ($n = 82$; 72.6%). The class size varied from 5 to 40 students, with an average size of 16 students. The most common size was from 10 to 20 ($n = 84$; 74.3%). Regarding the course sequence, students in most of the programs ($n = 109$; 96.5%) took the introductory group counseling course before or with the practicum course simultaneously, while students in the rest of the programs ($n = 4$; 3.5%) took the course after they completed the practicum course (Table 2).

Table 2

Curriculum

Category	Distribution (<i>N</i> = 113)
Number of Group Counseling Course(s)	One (74.3%)
	Two (23.0%)
	Three or More (2.7%)
Teaching Modality	In-Person (81.4%)
	Hybrid (15.0 %)
	Online (2.7%)
Weekly Class Hours	1.5-2 Hours (2.7%)
	2.5-3 Hours (72.6%)
	3.5-5 Hours (24.7%)
Class Size	5-9 (3.5%)
	10 – 20 (74.3%)
	21-40 (22.2%)
Course Sequence	Before/Co-Registered Practicum (96.5%)
	After Practicum (3.5%)

The participants were surveyed on the delivery methods and the materials used in their courses. The majority of the participants ($n = 108$) used both lectures and demonstration group videos. The participants shared the videos they used in class, such as those created by Corey ($n = 46$), Yalom ($n = 36$), Jacobs ($n = 11$), and Bauman and Steen ($n = 4$). They also reported the uses of role-play ($n = 20$), group discussion ($n = 6$), self-made videos ($n = 4$), movies or documentaries ($n = 4$), class project ($n = 3$), and Mindtap that is a comprehensive study tool including textbooks, quizzes, assignments, flashcards,

and a dictionary (Cengage, n.a.) ($n = 2$).

The participants also provided information on how students were assessed in their courses. The commonly used assignments were writing reflection journals ($n = 75$), creating group proposals ($n = 32$), conducting group observations and analyses ($n = 15$), and final exams or quizzes ($n = 15$).

Experiential Group

The participants shared information on the experiential group. The majority of the participants ($n = 111$; 98.2%) reported having experiential groups in their courses. Most of the experiential groups ($n = 97$; 87.4 %) consisted of only students in the counseling programs or the class, while some ($n = 9$; 8.1%) included students from other programs, and a few ($n = 5$; 4.5%) had individuals from the community as the experiential group members (Table 3). Two reported no experiential groups; however, one shared that their group theory and group experience courses were separated.

Table 3

Experiential Group

Category	Distribution (<i>n</i> = 111)
Group Members	Only students in the class/program (87.4%)
	Students from other programs (8.1%)
	Individuals from the community (4.5%)
Group Leader(s)	Instructor (12.6%)
	Students (25.2%)
	Professional counselors (20.7%)
	Doctoral/advanced master's students (12.6%)
	Instructor & Students (22.5%)
	Students & Professional counselors (5.4%)
	Doctoral students and Students (1.8%)
Group Types	Process group (55.0%)
	Psychoeducational group (5.4%)
	Support group (1.8%)
	Mixed group (37.8%)
Evaluation	Peer evaluation (<i>n</i> = 71)
	Instructor/supervisor evaluation (<i>n</i> = 83)
	Self-evaluation (<i>n</i> = 77)
Areas of Evaluation	Leadership skills & intervention (<i>n</i> = 14)
	Group process and dynamics (<i>n</i> = 5)
	Basic counseling skills (<i>n</i> = 4)
	Self-awareness (<i>n</i> = 3)
	Cultural competence (<i>n</i> = 1)

The responses regarding the use of group leaders varied. Some indicated that the instructor was the only leader of the experiential group ($n = 14$; 12.6%), while some had students ($n = 28$; 25.2%), outside professional counselors ($n = 23$; 20.7%), doctoral students or advanced master's students ($n = 14$; 12.6%) as the only leaders of the experiential groups. Other participants reported combinations of group leaderships. The experiential group may be led by the instructor and the students ($n = 25$; 22.5%), the students and the outside professional counselors ($n = 6$; 5.4%), or the doctoral students and the students ($n = 2$; 1.8%). Similarly, various types of experiential groups were reported. Some participants ($n = 61$; 55.0%) reported having experiential process groups such as self-growth group, 6 (5.4%) had psychoeducational groups, 2 (1.8 %) had support group, and 42 (37.8 %) reported having a mixed group such as having both process and psychoeducational groups. Interestingly, two programs also shared incorporating specific theory-based experiential groups such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy skills groups (Linehan, 1987) and Group Relations Style (e.g., McCollom, 1990). Some shared their unique formats, such as a hybrid of in-person and online experiential groups, outdoor experiential groups such as a rope course, and residency groups for online courses.

When students led the experiential groups, instructors reported various ways to evaluate the students' leadership skills. 71 participants (62.8%) incorporated peer evaluations, 83 (73.5%) had instructors or supervisors evaluation, and 77 (68.1%) had self-evaluation. The participants also shared the areas that the students were evaluated upon, which included leadership skills and intervention ($n = 14$), group process and dynamics ($n = 5$), basic counseling skills ($n = 4$), self-awareness ($n = 3$), and cultural competence ($n = 1$). Most of the participants ($n = 74$) reported using self-developed or department-adopted assessments or rubrics, while four reported using a standardized measurement such as

Counseling Competencies Scale-Revised (Lambie et al., 2018). Lastly, most participants (77.9%) reported providing feedback either through supervision or evaluation to the experiential group student leaders. The other participants shared that students either received feedback from peers or others who led the groups (e.g., outside professional counselors, doctoral students, or other instructors).

Self-Reflection

We incorporated a few questions related to the participants' self-reflection. The participants were asked to rate their self-efficacy regarding teaching group counseling courses on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being "low self-efficacy" and 5 being "high self-efficacy". The ratings ranged from 2 to 5, with an average score of 4.32 ($SD = .71$). Not surprisingly, the rating of self-efficacy was positively correlated with the number of times they had taught the group counseling courses ($r = .66, p < .01$) and the number of years they had become eligible for license or certificate ($r = .36, p < .01$).

The participants were also asked to share their teaching strategies and suggestions for instructors new to teaching group counseling courses. The qualitative responses were categorized into two groups: instructor-related and course-structure-related suggestions. The instructor-related recommendations included role-modeling group counseling skills in class, providing timely guidance and feedback, sharing personal experience of facilitating groups, being supportive, being organized, being open to criticism, trusting the group process, being aware of ethics in group work, and being authentic. The participants also emphasized the group instructors' own experiences of leading or participating in a group. As for the course-structure-related suggestions, the participants recommended instructors to provide experiential opportunities such as role-play in class, experiential groups, and the use of demonstration videos. They also recommended instructors to cover topics such as group dynamics and process, different types of groups with different populations,

stages of groups, leadership styles, and cultural issues. Lastly, the participants encouraged instructors to pay attention to the balance of skill training, knowledge, and students' self-efficacy.

Discussion

The primary purpose that undergirded this study was to understand the course structure of the group counseling course in counselor education. This exploratory study expanded the Merta et al. (1993) and Shumaker et al. (2011) studies and incorporated perspectives from the most recent literature. Specifically, we focused on three areas in the present survey: instructors, program/course curriculum, and the experiential component.

Instructors

We collected data regarding the participants' geographical region, the specialty areas in their institutions, the number of years since they became license or certificate eligible, and their experiences of teaching group counseling courses. Given the composition by geography and specialty, the sample seemed to be representative of instructors in counselor education. The number of years since license/certificate eligibility implies how far since they graduated from their master's training (or potentially doctoral training in some cases). The participants' responses were well distributed in all subgroups. Moreover, it is significant that more than half of the participants had taught group counseling courses one to five times, while most of the rest participants had taught either six to 10 times or more than 20 times. One should note that the similar questions asked in the previous studies were slightly different. The participants in Merta et al.'s (1993) study reported an average of 12.3 years of teaching experience, while the participants in Shumaker et al.'s (2011) study reported an average of 19.3 years of teaching group psychotherapy experience. It seems that the participants in all three studies have extensive experience of teaching group counseling courses. It is interesting to note that group

counseling courses are often taught by instructors with more experience. It may be related to the management of different components of group counseling courses which may require more experience.

Furthermore, participants in this study reported high self-efficacy in teaching group counseling courses. It was not surprising that self-efficacy was positively related to the times they had taught group counseling courses and the years they graduated from their specialty training. Although we could not identify any comparable literature in the counseling profession, these results are similar to nursing education. Researchers indicated that instructors' clinical and teaching experience were closely related to their teaching self-efficacy (Livesay et al., 2015; Nugent et al., 1999). The participants in this study also shared their teaching strategies and provided suggestions to new group counseling instructors echoed the results. The participants emphasized the importance of having clinical experiences in group work and being able to role-model group counseling skills. It was also suggested to teach group counseling as if one was leading a group - the instructors have to provide timely feedback, be supportive, communicate clear expectations, build rapport, be open to criticism, be organized, and be authentic. A similar strategy was recommended by the previous literature (Riva & Korinek, 2004) and explains why self-efficacy was positively correlated with the participants' teaching and clinical experiences.

Program/Course Curriculum

Based on the relatively small number of online programs in CACREP, it is not surprising that most institutions/programs in this study offered in-person teaching. Although the previous literature did not report similar information, given the recent changes in counselor education and higher education in general, we assume that the number of group counseling courses offered in a hybrid or online format is on the rise. In

fact, there is an increasing number of CACREP-accredited online counseling programs (CACREP, 2015). Furthermore, the majority of the programs offered only a single one-semester group counseling course, which coincided with the previous research (Merta et al., 1993; Shumaker et al., 2011). Despite the call by ASGW (2000) to offer more than a one-semester course on group counseling, it seems that counselor education programs struggle to arrange another group counseling course for reasons that have not been explored yet. Researchers recommended counselor education programs to have one course focusing on group counseling theories and others focusing on group counseling skills (Vannatta & Steen, 2019). However, with the lack of emphasis on group counseling skills in CACREP standards (2015), programs may not feel the urgent need to provide two or more group counseling courses. Instead, programs may choose other courses which help to meet all CACREP standards.

The participants were also surveyed on the number of weekly class hours and the class size. Three-quarters of participants in the survey reported having 2.5-3 hours weekly class meeting time, which is similar to the results of Shumaker et al. (2011). The reported class size in the present study (i.e., 16) also echoes the average number (i.e., 19) reported in the Shumaker et al. study. Moreover, the participants indicated that their group counseling courses were offered before or while the students had Practicum. We could not identify any relevant discussion in the literature. However, the result is understandable, given that students are expected to facilitate groups in their field experience (CACREP, 2015). Students learn group counseling knowledge and skills in the group counseling courses and they will get chances to practice those skills and knowledge in practicum or internship with the supervision of their site or university supervisors.

The participants reported various instruction methods, including lectures,

demonstration group videos, discussion, and other experiential activities (e.g., role play, fishbowl activity, and live demonstration by students or instructors). Similarly, the literature has recommended those methods for training group counseling skills as well as having a mix of experiential components and lectures (Barlow, 2004; Furr & Barret, 2000; Ohrt et al., 2013). The result suggests the importance of teaching group counseling courses via diverse pedagogical strategies. In the meantime, it once again shows the rich components that group counseling courses have to cover and implies the need for more than one-semester course.

As for the evaluation methods, the participants adopted writing reflection journals, creating group proposals, conducting group observations and analyses, and final exams or quizzes. A great portion of these methods looks at the fundamental knowledge of group counseling. On the other hand, when asked how to assess students' group leadership skills, the participants also reported the use of instructor/supervisor, peer, and self-evaluations. Interestingly, the participants did not consider these assessments as a part of student outcome evaluation, potentially because they typically do not carry any weight in the final scores. One of the reasons for not including it in the students' outcome evaluation is to limit the ethical problems in instructor-led or instructor-observed experiential groups (Merta et al., 1993). It is also worth noting that most participants adopted the self-developed assessment tools, which very likely have less credibility than standardized assessments regarding validity and reliability. These evaluation-related issues echoed the literature. For example, Vanatta and Steen (2019) urged the need for more skills-based evaluations in group counseling courses.

Experiential Group

Aligning with the professional standards (ASGW, 2000; CACREP, 2015), the majority of the participants included the experiential group in which students be the group

leaders or the members in their group counseling training, which is consistent with previous studies (Shumaker et al., 2011; St. Pierre, 2014). Moreover, most of the experiential groups reportedly only included students in the course, while a few required them to provide service to individuals outside of the course. It is suggested that such in-class experiential groups may reduce the stress level of the students and promote the cohesion of the group as they share similar experiences (Ieva et al., 2009). On the other hand, the opportunities to provide services to outside individuals may allow students to gain real-world experiences and avoid potential ethical concerns such as self-disclosure (Keim et al., 2015).

Unlike the previous study (Shumaker et al., 2011) in which the instructor-led group was the trend, only 12.4% in the present study adopted this format. Instead, the most frequent formats included student-led (24.8%), instructor-student-led (22.1%), and professional-led (20.4%) groups. This substantial change aligns with the literature, which argued that the alternative formats (i.e., not instructor-led) might reduce the potential ethical concerns, such as dual-relationship and the uncomfortableness to participate (Ieva et al., 2009; St. Pierre, 2014).

Furthermore, while the process group was reported as the most frequently adopted, the participants shared the use of a variety of group types, such as psychoeducational groups, support groups, mixed groups, and theory-based groups. This phenomenon matches the broadly discussed applications of experiential groups in literature, and each has its unique benefit (e.g., Choi & Protivnak, 2016; Topuz & Arasan, 2014). For instance, Ohrt et al. (2013) reported that both process and psychoeducational groups had similar effects on promoting the students' development of empathy, self-efficacy, and group cohesion. This result also demonstrates that group counseling instructors and programs have continuously explored experiential ideas to facilitate student learning. Lastly, about

three-quarters of the students in these experiential groups who were group leaders reportedly received feedback directly from the instructors through either evaluations or supervision. The result is consistent with Shumaker et al.'s (2011) study in which the combined percentage of the feedback group (Model 2b), instructor-observed group (Model 3a), and instructor-led group (Model 3b) was 80%.

Limitations

The results of this study ought to be examined in the context of several limitations. Firstly, we developed a survey based on the study purpose, the research questions, and the literature. We were able to have an external reviewer to ensure the validity; however, given the exploratory nature of this study, it was difficult to examine the reliability of the survey. Furthermore, we recruited the participants by getting the group counseling instructors' email addresses from the programs' websites and sent out personalized emails to increase the response rate. The high response rate (44.66%) indicated the efficacy of the method. However, given the unknown population size, we could not calculate the sampling error. Third, the survey was designed to be instructor-oriented instead of program-oriented. Therefore, we possibly received responses from instructors in the same programs, which may cause data distortion. Lastly, we did not include a group counseling practicum course in the survey. Some counseling programs require students to take group counseling courses earlier during their program and facilitate groups as group leaders under the supervision of the faculty and site supervisors during their group counseling practicum course. Therefore, the data may be skewed and not reflect further skill development and evaluation in the group counseling practicum courses in those programs.

Implications

The current study provides an overview of the common structures of group counseling courses in counselor education programs and the self-reflections of the

instructors. The results of this study also revealed many needs for future studies. For example, researchers may explore the best practice of teaching online group counseling courses as well as group telemental health, given the increasing number of online programs and the needs of the clients. The participants also used a variety of textbooks or videos for teaching group counseling. One may consider interviewing experts in group counseling to explore their perceptions of training the next generation group leaders. Furthermore, researchers may compare the student outcomes between programs with one and those with two or more group counseling courses to identify the needs for training. Lastly, we did not emphasize the supervision and evaluation component in this article. Therefore, future researchers may address these areas, such as developing a credible measurement tool for assessing group counseling skills in group counseling courses.

We also have recommendations to the counseling programs and counselor educators and supervisors. For the program level, given that the number of hybrid and online course offerings is increasing, counselor education programs may need to consider adding a new one that is delivered via hybrid or online to match the needs of the students. In terms of the number of group counseling courses, programs may discuss the possibility to restructure their curricula to increase the available group counseling training, especially for students who want to specialize in this area. Options include separating theories and experiential components, adding an advanced course that focuses on a particular group intervention, and offering a supervision training course that teaches students to be supervisors for group leaders.

For counselor educators who teach group counseling courses, it is recommended to gain experiences in facilitating groups, be genuine as a person who cares about students' wellbeing and learning and be intentional about balancing the lecture components and experiential components. Besides, instructors may consider adopting a credible

assessment tool to evaluate students' group counseling skills. The results of this study present a variety of resources (e.g., textbooks, videos), teaching techniques (e.g., the use of apps and movies), and the setups of the experiential components. Group counseling instructors may review these options and adopt ones that would maximize their teaching effectiveness. Lastly, instructors are encouraged to incorporate telehealth group counseling skills to prepare students to adapt to different work environments. The overarching theme in this study shows that group counseling training has diversified and become more creative. As a result, counselor educators and supervisors will need to be well-equipped for the best interest of the students.

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