

Final Integrative Paper

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A group counselor must have a clear theoretical orientation in facilitating practical group therapy sessions. This paper explores an integrative theoretical direction for group counseling, drawing upon critical concepts and techniques from the experiential and relationship-oriented approaches. These approaches emphasize the importance of exploring a person's subjective experiences and emotions in the present moment and using the therapeutic relationship to promote personal growth and development. The paper will highlight common themes and concepts associated with these approaches and how the student can apply them in effective group counseling practices.

Part One

Group counseling is popular in treating emotional, psychological, and behavioral issues. It is essential to have a theoretical orientation that draws upon key concepts and techniques from various group counseling models to guide the approach to facilitating groups. (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p.8)

Experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to therapy, such as Gestalt therapy and person-centered therapy, emphasize the importance of exploring a person's subjective experiences and emotions in the present moment. These approaches focus on the client's here-and-now experiences and use the therapeutic relationship to promote personal growth and development.

Gestalt therapy is described by (Perls et al., 2013) as "a process of awakening to the present moment, experiencing what is, and discovering how to express oneself fully." It

highlights the emphasis on present-moment experience and awareness in the Gestalt approach, a vital aspect of the experiential and relationship-oriented methods.

Person-centered therapy, also known as client-centered therapy, emphasizes the therapist's unconditional positive regard, empathy, and understanding of the client. The therapist creates a safe and supportive environment where clients can freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This approach emphasizes the client's inherent capacity for growth and change, and the therapist helps the client develop a deeper understanding and acceptance of themselves. (Rogers, 1957, p.96)

Existential therapy, on the other hand, focuses on the individual's life search for meaning and purpose. The therapist helps clients explore their existential concerns, such as mortality, freedom, and responsibility. This approach emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one's choices and actions and encourages clients to find meaning and purpose in life.

In Gestalt therapy, the therapist helps clients become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and encourages them to take responsibility for their experiences. This approach emphasizes integrating all aspects of the self, including thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, to promote wholeness and balance.

These approaches share a common belief that the therapeutic relationship is central to the therapeutic process. The therapist creates a safe and supportive environment where clients can explore their experiences and emotions without fear of judgment or criticism. The therapist's role is to help the client develop self-awareness, self-acceptance, and a greater sense of personal meaning and purpose.

The experiential and relationship-oriented approaches encompass existential, person-centered, and Gestalt therapies. These approaches view the individual as a whole, complex, and unique person with the capacity for self-awareness, growth, and change. The group counselor's primary role is to create a safe and supportive environment that fosters openness, authenticity, and vulnerability.

Key Concepts and View of the Role of the Group Counselor

Experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to group counseling are on the belief that individuals have an innate tendency towards growth and self-expression. These approaches view individuals as unique and complex, with the capacity for self-awareness, development, and change. In group counseling, individuals can connect with others experiencing similar issues and explore their experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

The primary role of the group counselor is to establish a safe and supportive environment that fosters openness, authenticity, and vulnerability. It involves creating a sense of trust within the group, which requires the counselor to be transparent and genuine with group members. Doing so makes group members more comfortable sharing their experiences and feelings, leading to greater self-awareness and self-expression.

The group counselor's role is not that of an expert or authority figure but rather a facilitator who collaborates with group members in exploring and understanding their experiences. The counselor collaborates with group members to identify patterns or themes contributing to their difficulties and provides support and guidance. However, it is ultimately up to the group members to determine their goals and work towards achieving them.

The group counselor's primary objective is to facilitate a process of self-exploration, growth, and change in a safe and supportive environment. The counselor serves as a guide and collaborator, helping group members connect with their inner selves and each other and, ultimately, helping them move towards greater authenticity and personal growth.

Role of Group Members:

In experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to group counseling, the role of group members is crucial to the success of the therapeutic process. Group members are unique individuals who bring their experiences, perspectives, and struggles to the group. They are encouraged to actively participate in the therapeutic process by sharing their experiences, emotions, and thoughts with others, providing feedback and support, and taking responsibility for their growth and change.

To create a safe and supportive environment, group members must respect each other's experiences and perspectives while maintaining confidentiality. It can help group members feel comfortable sharing their experiences and emotions, leading to greater self-awareness, personal growth, and an enhanced sense of connection.

Sharing and feedback can help group members feel less isolated and more connected to others experiencing similar challenges. This process can also help them better understand themselves and their struggles. As group members explore their experiences, identify their values and goals, and experiment with new ways of thinking and behaving, they can achieve personal growth and change.

In summary, group members play an active and collaborative role in experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to group counseling. This process can be challenging, but

ultimately it can lead to greater self-awareness, personal growth, and an enhanced sense of connection.

Essential Developmental Tasks and Therapeutic Goals: The critical developmental tasks of these approaches include developing self-awareness, understanding one's emotions and needs, and exploring one's values and goals. The therapeutic goals include enhancing self-esteem, promoting personal growth and development, and improving interpersonal relationships. The experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to group counseling emphasize the importance of personal growth and development. The therapeutic process aims at helping group members develop self-awareness and better understand their emotions, needs, values, and goals. The following are vital developmental tasks and therapeutic goals of these approaches:

- Developing self-awareness involves becoming more aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and how they impact one's life. Through group counseling, group members can gain insight into their personal experiences and how they relate to others.
- Understanding one's emotions and needs: Group members are encouraged to explore and identify their feelings and needs and how these impact their relationships and life experiences. Group members can develop more effective coping strategies and communication skills by better understanding their emotions and needs.
- Exploring one's values and goals: Group members are encouraged to identify their values and goals and the obstacles that may prevent them from achieving them. Through group counseling, group members can receive support and guidance in working towards their personal goals.

- **Enhancing self-esteem:** Group counseling can help members develop stronger self-worth and self-esteem. By providing support and validation, group members can feel more empowered and confident in themselves and their abilities.
- **Promoting personal growth and development:** Group counseling provides a safe and supportive environment for personal growth and development. Group members are encouraged to try new behaviors and approaches and to challenge themselves to grow and change.
- **Improving interpersonal relationships:** Group members can develop more effective communication and relationship skills through group counseling. By practicing these skills in the group, group members can transfer them to their personal and professional relationships outside the group.
- **The critical developmental tasks and therapeutic goals of the experiential and relationship-oriented approaches to group counseling aim to promote personal growth, enhance self-awareness, and improve interpersonal relationships. By working towards these goals, group members can develop a greater sense of fulfillment and well-being.**

Techniques and Methods: The techniques and methods used in these approaches include active listening, empathic responding, reflection, self-disclosure, and nonverbal communication. The group counselor may also use creative techniques such as role-playing, psychodrama, and experiential exercises to promote self-expression and exploration.

Stages in the Evolution of a Group: The stages of group development in these approaches include forming, storming, norming, performing, and terminating. During the forming stage, group members establish relationships and explore their experiences. In the storming stage, conflicts and disagreements may arise as group members become more comfortable with each

other. During the norming phase, group members establish norms and rules for communication and behavior. In the performing stage, group members work towards achieving their goals and progressing toward personal growth and development. Finally, during the terminating phase, group members reflect on their experiences and say goodbye to the group.

Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches

The cognitive-behavioral approaches include Transactional Analysis (TA), behavior therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), Reality Therapy, and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). These approaches focus on the present and the future and view problems as the result of harmful or distorted thinking and behaviors. The central concept is that changing one's thoughts and behaviors can change how one feels and respond to the world around them.

Part Two

Personal Learnings

Throughout my participation in this small group, I have gained valuable insight into my attitudes and behaviors that could either enhance or detract from my effectiveness as a group leader. One of my most significant learnings was recognizing the importance of active listening in group settings. As an intern, I am responsible for providing helpful feedback or solutions to group members' issues. However, during this group, I learned that active listening is just as crucial as giving feedback, if not more so. By actively listening and creating space for group members to share their experiences without interruption or judgment, I can make a more supportive and inclusive environment for them to explore their concerns.

Another aspect of myself that I have learned about is my tendency to take on too much responsibility in group settings. I feel responsible for the group's progress and success, which can sometimes cause me to overlook group members' individual needs and perspectives. However, this group taught me that each member has unique needs and perspectives. Considering each member's experiences and feedback is essential to create a more collaborative and effective group dynamic.

In terms of my goals, I identified at the first session that I wanted to become more comfortable with silence in group settings.

Through this group, I have learned to become more comfortable with silence and recognize that it can be a valuable tool for group members to reflect on their experiences and feelings.

As a group leader in future groups, I will take these personal learnings into account to create a more supportive and collaborative environment for group members. I will actively listen, create space for group members to share their experiences without judgment, and consider each member's needs and perspectives. Additionally, I will work to become more comfortable with silence and recognize its value as a tool for reflection and exploration in group settings.

Group Personality:

The personality of our group was initially quiet and reserved, with members hesitant to share personal experiences or concerns. However, as the group progressed, members began to open up and share more freely, creating a more supportive and collaborative environment. Members tended to interact with one another in a respectful and supportive manner, actively listening and providing feedback when appropriate.

Effective Group Functioning:

Throughout this group, I learned that effective group functioning relies on several key factors. These include creating a supportive and inclusive environment for group members to explore their concerns, actively listening and providing appropriate feedback, and recognizing each member's unique needs and perspectives.

Stages of Group: Our group went through several stages, including the initial stage of forming, followed by the storming stage, where members expressed their concerns and worked through conflicts. We then moved into the norming stage, where group members began to work collaboratively and supportively. Finally, we reached the performing stage, where group members felt comfortable sharing personal experiences and providing feedback to one another.

Trust Development: Trust was initially low in our group, as members hesitated to share personal experiences or concerns. However, as the group progressed and members began to open up, trust developed, creating a more supportive and collaborative environment.

Formulating Goals: The group worked collaboratively, with each member providing feedback and input. It created a sense of ownership and investment in the group's progress and success. The process of formulating goals was a collaborative effort within our group. Each member had an opportunity to provide feedback and input on our plans, which helped create a sense of ownership and investment in the group's progress and success. This process was essential in establishing a clear focus for the group and meeting everyone's needs and goals.

At the beginning of our first session, we spent time brainstorming potential goals that we wanted to achieve as a group. Each member shared their ideas, and we discussed them as a

group, identifying areas of overlap and potential barriers. We developed several overarching goals we wanted to work towards as a group through this process.

Throughout the rest of our sessions, we revisited these goals, discussing our progress toward achieving them and identifying any new goals we wanted to add. Each member had an opportunity to provide feedback on the purposes and the progress that we were making, which helped to ensure that we were all invested in the group's success.

One of the benefits of this collaborative approach was that it allowed us to address any conflicts or issues that arose within the group. If members had to meet their needs or the group needed to progress towards a particular goal, they could raise these concerns with the group and work collaboratively to address them. It helped to promote a sense of transparency and openness within the group, which was essential in creating a safe and supportive space for us to explore our experiences.

According to (W. Johnson & T. Johnson, 2019, pp. 17-18), "Cooperation is a process in which people work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals." This approach allowed for open communication and conflict resolution within the group, promoting a safe and supportive environment for exploration. The authors note that "when people work together cooperatively, they can create better solutions than any individual could produce."

Formulating goals was a collaborative effort that helped establish a clear focus for the group to meet the group's needs and goals. Through this process, we created a sense of ownership and investment in the group's progress and success, which is essential in promoting positive growth and development. As a future group leader, I plan to incorporate this

collaborative approach into my practice, ensuring that all members have a voice in goal-setting and promoting ownership and investment in the group's success.

Supervisors' Impact: The supervisors played a crucial role in guiding the group process, providing feedback and insight when necessary. The supervisor role in our group was essential in facilitating a positive group process. He provided guidance and support, creating a safe and supportive space to explore our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The supervisors actively listened to our discussions throughout our meetings, asked thought-provoking questions, and provided insightful feedback. They encouraged us to be honest and open with one another, promoting an atmosphere of trust and vulnerability.

According to (Toseland & Rivas, 2022, p.187), "Group work practice can be enhanced by integrating theory with practice. Theories help practitioners understand why certain interventions are likely to be effective in certain situations and not others." The supervisors' use of theory provided a framework for understanding the group process and helped members gain new perspectives on their issues. Additionally, the authors state that "supervisors can offer guidance and support to group leaders, helping them to understand the dynamics of the group better and to develop effective interventions." (Toseland & Rivas, 2022, p.194).

One significant way the supervisor impacted our group was through their use of feedback. During each session, he provided positive and constructive feedback on how we were doing as a group. This feedback was invaluable in helping us identify growth areas and reinforcing the positive things we were doing. Additionally, they were skilled in addressing differences within the group, guiding how to work through them constructively.

Another way the supervisors impacted our group was through their use of theory. He exposed the group to various group work theories and models. The supervisor would use these theories to guide our discussions, help us to understand our experiences in a broader context, and offer new perspectives on our concerns. It was constructive in providing a framework for understanding the group process and how it functioned.

The supervisor was critical in supporting the group process, providing guidance and insight when necessary, and creating a safe and supportive space for us to explore our thoughts and feelings. The use of feedback and theory helped us understand our experiences more thoroughly, identify growth areas, and work constructively through any differences that arose. As a future group leader, I plan to incorporate these skills into my practice, utilizing feedback and theory to create a safe and supportive space for group members to explore their experiences and promote positive growth.

According to (Corey & Corey, 1977, pp. 224-226), "Effective feedback helps group members become aware of their behaviors and attitudes and their impact on others. It is a key element in promoting change and growth." The supervisors' positive and constructive feedback helped members identify growth areas and reinforce positive behavior. Additionally, the authors note that "feedback is a skill that can be developed with practice and is essential to the growth and development of group members."

A supportive and inclusive environment can be created through collaborative efforts, active listening, and recognizing individual needs and perspectives, leading to positive growth and development. Collaborative goal setting involves all parties working together to establish shared goals that are meaningful and relevant to everyone involved. This approach ensures that

all members have a voice in the goal-setting process. It promotes ownership and investment in the group's success when collaboratively established goals are more likely to be achieved.

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