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Welcome to the Brooks/Cole Counseling E-Communicator. The goal of our quarterly newsletter is to communicate with you, our valued customer. Our intent is to provide you with informative news, announcements, great ideas in teaching, and an opportunity for you to find out more about us.

Announcements

- Do you have any announcements that you would like us to include in our next edition? Please e-mail Caroline with your announcement by 1/15/04 at caroline.concilla@thomson.com

Great Ideas in Teaching

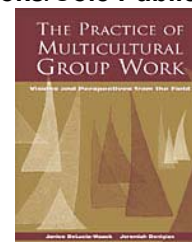
We'd like to highlight and share great ideas in teaching counseling... whether it's an activity, a unique lesson, or a self-created web component, we'd love to showcase your great teaching efforts. To submit a "Great Ideas in Teaching" Counseling example, please e-mail Caroline at caroline.concilla@thomson.com OR, if you have a text proposal in mind that reflects YOUR great teaching, please email Executive Editor, Lisa Gebo at lisa.gebo@thomson.com (skills & practicum areas only) or Senior Editor, Marquita Flemming at marquita.flemming@thomson.com (for all other counseling areas).

Spotlight On

Suggestions For Best Practices In Multicultural Group Work

By Jeremiah Donigian, Professor Emeritus, SUNY Brockport and Janice DeLucia-Waack, University at Buffalo, SUNY; authors of ***The Practice of Multicultural Group Work: Visions and Perspectives from the Field* 2004©**

Brooks/Cole Publication



We would like to make some suggestions for best practices related to multicultural group work. We all make mistakes and we all make assumptions about other people. People are different and some of these differences are the results of individual uniqueness, while other differences result from cultural backgrounds or worldviews. When differences in interpersonal style or preference manifest themselves, group members need to discuss the differences and still find a way to be respectful. Safety, cohesion, and universality are essential. Effective group counseling skills and group work interventions from a multicultural perspective have received little attention. Our book is an integration of what the literature recommends about multicultural counseling competencies and effective group work with what our 11 experts in both group work and multicultural counseling have shared with us in their cultural autobiographies and reactions to different group work scenarios. Based on the integration of group practice and current research and theory, we make the following suggestions:

1. Group Leaders must have an Awareness Of Different Cultural Worldviews And Their Impact Of Group Work Interventions

It is essential for group leaders to have a good understanding of the diversity of cultural worldviews, and their potential impact on relationships, behaviors, and willingness to participate in a therapeutic group



Donigian/DeLucia-Waack Article Continued

work. The message clearly is that it is not essential to have researched every potential worldview and its implications for behavior, but more so the absolute importance of understanding as a group leader that each person approaches participation in a group from their own unique perspective.

Dyche and Zayas (1995) emphasized very eloquently the importance of cultural knowledge intertwined with understanding each group member as a unique individual: "A case might be made that the major benefit to therapists from the study of other cultures is less to understand their clients than to understand themselves. A thoughtful reading of cross-cultural literature can open therapists to the diversity of answers to life's universal questions, and arouse a curiosity that competes with their native ethnocentrism. In the end, the most important application of cultural theory to practice is self-discipline: never assume with a client; always inquire" (p. 391).

We suggested beginning the process of cultural exploration by figuring out who you were as a cultural person, what your cultural traditions are, and how they influence who you are as person. Part of the reason that we suggested this examination process is that most of us have been influenced by a variety of cultures and it is important to analyze how we have integrated these different experiences.

2. Groups Counselors must have an Awareness Of Their Personal Beliefs And Attitudes, Knowledge And Skills For Effective Group Work Practice

Our current use of group work is often based in Eurocentric models of counseling. In order to avoid imposing Eurocentric beliefs about counseling and your own cultural values onto group members, we suggest considering the following questions: What are your cultural beliefs related to relationships, healing, and mental health? What are your beliefs as mental health practitioners and group leaders related to relationships, healing, and mental health? And how much of those beliefs are influenced by and based on the Eurocentric perspective? The next step is to examine the similarities and differences between your own cultural and therapeutic beliefs, and potentially those of group members from other cultures.

3. Group Leaders Must Provide Culturally Relevant Group Work Interventions

The third area of emphasis is on the group leaders' ability to provide ethical and culturally relevant group leadership. Several things must be considered: What is the focus of the group? Psychoeducational, task, counseling, or therapeutic in nature? Are the goals culturally consonant with the cultural values of potential group members? Are similarities desirable among group members in terms of cultural background, problem, and experiences desired? Are there advantages to the group being homogeneous in terms of race or culture? If so, should levels of acculturation need to be attended to? The possible impact of different levels of racial identity development on willingness to participate in group and attainment of group goals must also be examined. The content of the screening interviews needs to then be tailored to assess factors that may impact group member success and goals in a specific group.

The incorporation of traditional methods of healing and wellness into current group work practices is another way to utilize effective practices and integrate culture. Indigenous cultural specific healing methods and rituals have been used successfully for centuries. One bias group leaders may often overlook in themselves is the promotion of Western models of counseling over more indigenous healing methods.

4. Group Leaders must identify and address Specific topics and issues in multicultural groups.

The acknowledgement of group members' thoughts' and feelings. Each person's uniqueness within the group must be acknowledged. Some general suggestions to group leaders include:

Treat each group member as an individual.

Be aware of within group differences.

Consider the group members' level of acculturation.

Make no assumptions.

Learn about group members' culture from multiple sources.

Acknowledge that you and your members come to group with different perspectives and that all perspectives are valued.



Donigian/DeLucia-Waack Article Continued

Admit that sometimes you are ignorant and that you will ask questions to gain knowledge.
Be aware of multiple sources of oppression such as race, class, nation of origin, and gender.
Be aware of the differences in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to the concepts of respect and equality in different cultures.

The exploration of cultural values and worldviews on the definition of the problem and suggestions for change. Regardless of the specific type of group, population, or setting, all multicultural groups have three goals in common: (1) Help members conceptualize problems within a personal and conceptual concept so the plan of action can be formulated consistent with an individual's belief system. (2) Approach all events and behaviors in the group from a functional perspective. Individuals must examine the behavior in terms of how it helps them function in relationships. What would make their relationships better? The emphasis within the group must be on exploring cultural differences without assuming that one way of behaving is necessarily better than others. Each member's perspective must be valued or the group may function as a way to assimilate minority clients (Leong, 1992). Recognizing that directly communicating wants, needs, strengths and weaknesses is a Eurocentric value means that group leaders need to be creative in helping their group members communicate in a way in which they feel comfortable. Metaphors, narratives, and storytelling may all be useful techniques. (3) Help members make sense of new behaviors, beliefs, and skills within a cultural context. As members change and/or learn a new behavior, it must be examined within the cultural framework. What are the cultural implications for this changed and/or new behavior? Group leaders and members need to learn that they have choices; and that "to act inconsistently with their cultural values may not necessarily mean a denial of a unique cultural heritage. Some members may rationally choose to change their patterns of behavior because new behaviors better align with the kind of person they desire to be, and not necessarily because the changes merely conforming to the majority culture's codes" (Greeley et al., 1992; p. 207).

The importance of the group leader in modeling humanness and that people make mistakes. Group work helps people to learn relationship skills so that they can develop new relationships and enhance current relationships in their lives. The group leaders' role in this process is to model mediation, risk-taking, and communication skills; and to encourage members as well. Group leaders will make mistakes, will make assumptions, will ask members to do things that they do not want to do; and it is up to group leaders to model how to appropriately respond to challenges, take feedback, and make changes in their behavior as requested by group members.

Group leaders need not be afraid to raise the issue of racial and cultural differences. These differences are inherent in any group and must be addressed. Conflict and differences between people are key themes in the transition stage of group. Members need to realize the importance of acknowledging differences between each other and the impact of differences on relationships within the group. Finally, group leaders need to model for members how to introduce and address the issue of cultural differences, and how to respond in a sensitive and open way.

Self-awareness as a multicultural person and a multiculturally sensitive group leader is the beginning of the journey toward competence as a multicultural group leader. We hope that this book will serve as a guide for fellow group leaders as they explore and appreciate multicultural differences and their impact on group work as they struggle with and try to reconcile who they are as persons and as group leaders in a multicultural world.



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