

## Article 13

### **A Process for Group Leadership Outcome Measurement**

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#### **Abstract**

Nothing in training counselors is as significant or difficult as defining and measuring the skills that are being imparted to the next generation of counselors, and the complexity of group work increases this challenge. CACREP and ASGW inform the process, and this article attempts to move from concepts to course activities, actual rubrics, and 5 years of experience using these rubrics. The focus in this study has been on the group skills associated with beginning a group, ending a group, and managing what happens between those events.

The application of rubrics to group counseling has not received much attention. Regardless of the reason(s) for this omission, the deficit is odious, and overcoming it is the purpose of this article. Real life contexts are needed to assess performance of knowledge that has been conceptualized from academic learning in order to develop ability (Frey & Hartig, 2009). Reflecting the group work competencies in assessment of master's student abilities offers the advantage of deep theoretical instruction opportunities for counselor educators.

Competency in a profession suggests developmental growth and improvement. Counselor educators find themselves in a continuous appraisal of student learning and skill development. Students are often viewed as learning in phases, developmentally (Brown, 2010; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Development of appropriate models and tools for measuring competence will similarly require many steps from defining the terminology and specific concepts and their dimensions to

agreement between teaching institutions and accreditation bodies as to relevance of specific curriculum and practice relationships to be demonstrated in professional applications (Leigh et al., 2007).

Outcomes more clearly describe what students know and are able to do, rather than what the curriculum intends to teach them (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Berg, Landreth, and Fall (2006) developed a competency assessment that lists the group competencies and what they titled “Performance Guidelines,” with spaces for rating on a scale of 1 to 5, and including NO (Not Observed) and NE (Not Evident). Otherwise, a developmental rubric has not been found.

During this discussion, a model of group counselor skill rubrics that has been used with master’s level counselors in training for half a decade will be presented and a format for structuring group leadership and faculty evaluation of students will be described and evaluated. While counselor educators could find additional methods for measuring group leadership and become more comfortable with the concept of group outcome measurements, this program suggests three group leader rubrics, a structure for providing each student group leadership opportunities, and a feedback system to the student.

### **Group Counseling Standards and Competencies**

Counselor educators are tasked to develop a systematic assessment process by which they are able to state that students are sufficiently prepared to enter their professional field of counseling practice (Hamlet & Burnes, 2013). Constructing appropriate psychometric tools to do competency assessment is complex, yet group workers have the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards and research-based structures in the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) competencies as a foundation upon which to build.

#### **CACREP 2009 Standards**

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009, Section I, Standard AA, p. 5) specifies that counselors in training receive a “systematic developmental assessment” of their professional and personal development as well as their academic performance during their counseling preparation program. CACREP (2009) has designated eight required core competency areas for master’s level counselors, of which group work is one. CACREP published program accreditation standards to include group specific standards.

There is no specific number of courses required in group theory, knowledge, and skills. However, CACREP specifies five areas of coverage in counselor training, including group dynamics, leadership or facilitation styles, theories of group counseling, group counseling methods, and group experience in counseling curricula and requires 10 hours of group experience in one academic term (Rapin, 2011). How and where in the program the comprehensive assessment is accomplished is the prerogative of the counselor educator.

#### **ASGW**

ASGW (1998, 2000, 2008) clearly articulates standards for communication, clinical reasoning, values, and professional reflection demonstrated in effective

performance. Converting the ASGW competencies to rubrics and structuring the classroom experience to allow each student opportunity to demonstrate his/her skills and have faculty provide him/her with feedback (a CACREP 2009 requirement) is a challenge.

Training standards vary widely across organizations focused on counselor training and practice (Rapin, 2011); however, consistency was noted in most critical areas of importance to group work. These rubrics allow students opportunity to demonstrate their required skills and faculty to provide them with feedback.

### **Developing Group Outcomes**

Applying CACREP and ASGW guidance to the measurement of master's students group leadership outcomes becomes the next aspect of rubric creation. Since groups go through stages of development, these skills could be divided accordingly.

#### **Group Development**

Group development can be described in numerous ways (Gazda, Ginter, & Horne, 2001; Tuckman, 1965) but can be distilled into the ideas that they begin, they end, and something happens in between beginning and ending (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2010; Gladding, 2011). For the purpose of this article, leading groups requires at least the knowledge and skills necessary to begin and end group and then to facilitate something meaningful between those two points. Once these stages and elements are reasonably addressed, more details from additional development considerations could be concentrated on in future training.

Although any individual counseling theory can be applied in the group environment, group work particularly draws from an existential focus on the human condition, particularly isolation and belonging, and person-centered empathy skills. As any group begins, people will wonder if they will be accepted and valued and will often reenact whatever they have learned from family and other groups (Yalom, 1985). Yalom's (1985) curative features are a listing of existential concepts: the imparting of information, instillation of hope, universality, altruism, corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, imitative behavior, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, existential factors, and catharsis. Group is a veritable petri dish of existential issues that counselors-in-training need to have mastered prior to their group class(es) (Moble, 2005).

"You never outgrow your need for" active listening (Gordon, 1970)—or whatever description is used for Rogers' expressed empathy (1967). Everything that was taught in individual counseling class about establishing rapport (Rogers, 1951), getting into clients' phenomenology (Conyne, Crowell, & Newmeyer, 2008), understanding their private logic (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1989), and demonstrating acceptance (Rogers, 1967) using summary statements, feeling words, and combinations of these together applies to group work in the beginning, during the middle, and at the ending of the group. The counselor's job is to understand the client, communicate that the client is understood, and "attempt to determine if he is accurately perceiving the client's thoughts and feelings" (Krumboltz & Thoresen, 1969, p. 8) in all counseling, individual and group.

In group counseling, the disposition, knowledge, and skills associated with existential and person-centered counseling can be applied early and often. The issues that might be addressed will vary depending on the stage of development, but the leadership requirement to recognize and verbalize acceptance and understanding to group members extends throughout the group experience.

### **Beginning a Group**

Groups begin with leaders providing at least four essential pieces: the purpose of the group, an agreement on confidentiality (“what is said here stays here”), an explanation about how to leave the group (“talk to the group about your need to leave the group”), and an opportunity to introduce and meet each other (some sort of mixer that allows them to introduce themselves on a favorable basis: “what animal/color/car/kitchen appliance/song/movie would you be and why?”). The leader facilitates this activity using existential considerations and person-centered skills (Conyne et al., 2008).

Depending on the setting, other “rules” might be useful. It was not that long ago that time was often spent talking about whether or not people could smoke in group. Bathroom issues can be important for younger clients; “respect” can be an important topic for the group to consider or “one person talks at a time”; “be present and participate constructively”; and “communicate using I rather than You messages” (Capuzzi, Gross, & Stauffer, 2010, p. 75). The more input group members have, the more buy-in they have for the rule.

Remember to do more in the first session than just these diligence items. Overviewing the sessions and defining the terms to be discussed could probably help in the future and might clarify the purpose of the group (e.g., What is stress? What causes stress? What are some physical activities I can do to lower stress? What are some mental activities I can do to lower stress?) (Rapin & Crowell, 2013). I prefer to have group members turn in some problem situations on note cards (Mobley & Fort, 2007) that can be reviewed in the fourth or fifth sessions to see if the training has provided them with strategies for addressing their concerns (see Figure 1.).

The rubric for starting a group includes the following topics: planning a group (measured outside the group except for following-up on homework); screening the group members (deferred until internship); introducing the group to the leader, the topic, the group rules, and the participants to each other. The items are measured first in terms of whether or not they met the standard (unacceptable or acceptable and marking what was unacceptable) and then determining if the demonstrated behavior was beyond “Acceptable” and included elements of “Target” behaviors. The counselor-in-trainings’ performance can be check-off or circled on the first rubric to describe their demonstration of the basic skills in starting group session.

Counseling students need to develop their words and style of performing the initial information activities. The essence of the rubric is a checklist. Since students have had individual counseling, they should be able to active listen to the group members as the four discussions occur. Every student usually completes this rubric in one night. Other topics can be introduced by the group facilitators, but these topics are essential.

<b>Counselor Indicators</b>	<b>Target <i>a, b, &amp; c + at least 1 more (check successes)</i></b>	<b>Acceptable <i>All</i> (check successes)</b>	<b>Unacceptable <i>fewer than four</i> (check problems)</b>
<b>Introductions</b>	d. Counselor helps members to connect with each other e. Group reports a positive experience f. Explains how to leave the group	a. Counselor discusses purpose of group b. Counselor explains rules and confidentiality c. Counselor helps members to meet each other	a. No purpose discussed b. Rules and confidentiality not explained c. Limited introductions d. Poor connections and enthusiasm e. No explanation of leaving group
<b>Planning</b>	d. Has homework assignments per session e. Has alternatives if they become necessary f. Has specific interventions for some members	a. Counselor screens potential members b. Counselor has a lesson plan for each session, including warm-ups and learning activities c. Lesson plans have time limits per activity	a. Does not screen group members b. Does not have a plan; no details for a plan c. No time limits d. No homework assignments
<b>Active Listening</b>	e. Counselor offers encouragement for client to respond f. Counselor uses nonverbal postures to encourage client to respond	a. Counselor uses "You feel... because..." b. Counselor seems natural doing "a" c. Counselor does active listening often (4 or more times)	a. Does not use "You feel... because..." b. Not natural doing "a" c. Does not use active listening often
<b>Total</b>			

Figure 1. Rubric 1. Measuring Student Leadership Performance at the Beginning of a Group.

### Ending a Group

Similar to beginning the group, ending the group has three things that need attention: looking back, looking forward, and saying good-bye. Looking back involves having group members report what they learned during the sessions to the group. The group leader can active listen the responses and help members to connect the information to their goals. Looking forward could be a homework assignment for them to make a plan for what they can do with the information over the next few weeks (for younger group members) or months (for older group members). If the topic for the final session was on Planning for the Future or something similar, then the group might have additional skills for implementing what they had learned in the group. Again, do not just do the diligence

in the final session; use the time to teach something that might be helpful. (Skipping Rubric 2, see Rubric 3 in Figure 2.)

<b>Counselor Indicators</b>	<b>Target <i>a, b, &amp; c + at least 1 more</i> (check successes)</b>	<b>Acceptable <i>All</i> (check successes)</b>	<b>Unacceptable <i>fewer than four</i> (check problems)</b>
<b>Closure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d. Counselor seeks closure for purpose of group</li> <li>e. Counselor helps group evaluate its success meeting goals</li> <li>f. Group reports a positive experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Counselor seeks closure for members: what did you learn?</li> <li>b. Counselor helps members make future plans</li> <li>c. Helps members to say goodbye to each other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No closure for purpose of group</li> <li>b. No closure for members of group</li> <li>c. No review of learning or future planning</li> <li>d. No evaluation of individual or group successes</li> <li>e. No provision for goodbyes</li> <li>f. Poor connections and enthusiasm</li> </ul>
<b>Active Listening and Assertiveness/ Self-disclosure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d. Uses “I feel...because...” to address issues that have occurred in the group.</li> <li>d. Counselor plans ahead of time to tell each group member or group re: perception of their growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Uses “You feel ...because...”</li> <li>b. Uses “I feel...because...” to affirm people in group.</li> <li>c. Uses “I feel...because...” to affirm purpose of group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Minimal or no active listening</li> <li>c. No affirmations of group members</li> <li>d. No affirmation for the purpose of the group</li> <li>e. No affirmation for the issues individuals and the group have addressed</li> </ul>
Total			

Figure 2. Rubric 3. Measuring Student Leadership Performance at the End of a Group.

In the concluding session of a group, the leader might say something like, “This group has come to an end. You will never be together like this again—this is a little death. That usually comes with mixed feelings: some sadness to leave the supportive place that was created and some joy at what has been accomplished. I would like to help you say good-bye to the group members by doing an activity.”

The significant issue involved in concluding a group is closure: providing members with the time to state what they have learned is important and sets the stage for them developing a plan for what they can do in the future to apply what they have learned. These elements can be combined into a single activity: what did you learn and what is your plan for using what you learned? The leader communicating understanding to each member is important.

Saying good-bye in some form is very existential. Any form of having the group members talk to each of the other group members is good. The leader needs to be a

participant in this process and may want to say their positive perceptions of each person in front of the group. An activity, adjusted to be age appropriate, like writing affirmations on a sheet of paper on everyone's back or the cool seat where affirmations are whispered by each member into one member's ear at time has been powerful. These activities bring closure to the group and help the group members to leave the group with a sense of closure.

Rubric 3 provides a checklist for these activities and includes active listening. Having counselors assert themselves and speak genuinely about their interactions with the members at this stage is an important skill, which can be referred to as I-messages (Gordon, 1970) and are included in the rubric.

### **Doing the Group**

Between these two rather scripted sessions, bookends, group counseling occurs. A lot of information and activities along with existential and person-centered responses are brought to the group by the leader. How the leader implements the lesson plan, processes the group, connects the people with their goals, experiences each group member and the group, and directs and responds to all these issues depends on who the leader is and their theory of counseling (Conyne et al., 2008). Determining what needs to be done, when it is to be done, and doing it needs to be taught and evaluated. The most complex rubric will be applied to this part of the group process.

Many decisions will need to be made about increasing or decreasing the involvement of some group members (the spark plug talker may need to be marginalized to allow more space for some quieter members), taking time to discuss a significant issue or interaction (e.g., a group member who does not like or does not respond to another group member), reoccurring silences that emerge after particular topics or requests (silence after a leader suggests that group members talk about how they might apply the session's topic or a member asks for feedback on an issue), subgroups that have formed and members who have remained isolated, or changes in the intensity of energy or enthusiasm (group is flat or group is energized). Along with presenting the information associated with that session and active listening each participant, the need for these group dynamic issues should be taught: practicing the skills that are associated with them, getting feedback on the their application, and evaluating student performance on these issues by the end of the grading period needs to occur (see Rubric 2 in Figure 3).

The leader's time is very busy between the start and finish bookends. In addition to including the right things educationally for the group, including homework, and doing the existential and person-centered skills, managing the group experience involves several specific skills that are taught and evaluated: maintaining and protecting the group, its purpose(s), and its members and allowing the group to have times of silence while it grapples with an issue, are two basic leadership skills.

Additionally, more advanced group leaders might be able to recognize and address "Target" issues that occur in the group, such as the group not confronting the person who is habitually late, and interpret the group's or a member's response or lack of response (e.g., "You seem to believe that a nice group that avoids conflict is a happy group"); to utilize more advanced skills of linking and gatekeeping to connect group members or to manage the level of participation of group members; and a recognition of the group of the quality of their experience in the group or of energy in the session(s).

While a positive self-report about the group can obscure the work that is being done, on the other hand, with positive efforts and successes comes positive feelings and energy.

<b>Counselor Indicators</b>	<b>Target <i>a, b, &amp; c + at least 1 more</i> (check successes)</b>	<b>Acceptable <i>All</i> (check successes)</b>	<b>Unacceptable <i>fewer than four</i> (check problems)</b>
<b>Planning</b>	c. Counselors have specific interventions for some members. d. Counselors have specific interventions for the group.	a. Counselor makes and reviews homework assignments per session b. Counselor has alternative activities they could use	a. No homework assignment b. No specific homework c. No alternatives d. No plans for specific people
<b>Leadership</b>	d. Counselor uses linking and gatekeeping e. Counselor helps members to face issues with each other f. Group reports a positive experience	a. Counselor affirms purpose of group b. Counselor addresses issues that occur in the group c. Counselor uses silence	a. No support for group purpose b. Avoids group issues c. Prematurely ends silence d. Does not link or gatekeep e. Avoids conflicts between individuals f. Poor connections and enthusiasm
<b>Active Listening</b>	c. Counselor reflects emotions and/or issues in the group.	a. Uses “You feel ...because...” b. Counselor seems natural doing “a” statements	a. Minimal or no active listening b. Does not seem natural doing “a” statements
<b>Assertiveness</b>	c. Counselor does assertiveness often with good timing	a. Counselor uses “I feel... because...” b. Counselor seems natural doing “a” statements	a. Does not use “I feel...because...” often b. Does not seem natural doing “a” statements
<b>Total</b>			

Figure 3. Rubric 2. Measuring Student Leadership Performance in the Middle of a Group.

Like the other scales, the topics are measured across three scales. Either the leader’s performance was “Acceptable” or “Unacceptable.” If it was “Acceptable,” were any of the advanced behaviors evidenced? Any advanced behaviors would be marked “Target.” Passing the rubric involves scoring at least “Acceptable” on all of the categories.

### Using the Rubric

In the master’s counseling education program, the two places in the program where these three group leader rubrics are used include the group course and internship. Some of the elements, like screening group members, cannot be observed until students are in the field.

The standard that is applied for counselors-in-training is that they need to demonstrate that they are doing the skill at least at the “Acceptable” level. A simulation is performed where each class member is given the opportunity to perform the skill with the professor monitoring the group and providing feedback after the demonstration. While



reviewing the attempt, the teacher and group members give affirmations for appropriate behaviors and offer suggestions for limited ones. Met items and unmet items are identified; advanced performance is noted. Ideally, within the week, the evaluation is entered into LiveText and available to the student and LiveText coordinator as a permanent record.

In the group class students are given opportunities to repeat the skills until they are successful before the semester ends. The last class has sometimes run long to accommodate some of these attempts. The goal is to do whatever it takes to have the students learn and demonstrate the goal behavior before the course concludes. Remediation can occur until the standard is demonstrated during the subsequent semester if the performance is less than what is required or other decisions can be made. A student is not allowed in the field for practicum or internship until they have been rated as successful on these group rubrics. Low grades are handled according to the university policies.

### **Conclusion**

Assessing master's group leaders' performances to determine their competency and preparation to move to the next stage of their development is exhibited in this discussion. The rubric takes into consideration CACREP and ASGW standards and competencies respectively and describes knowledge and skills to be demonstrated by group leaders as they begin, facilitate the middle productive sessions, and end groups.

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