

Group Work Training For Counselors: A Syllabus

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Abstract

This article describes a syllabus for an introductory group work class at Master and Doctorate levels in Counseling and related professional fields. It is based upon current trends in the area of training for group work specialists, trends that are represented by the Association for Group Work Specialist (ASGW). The syllabus contains: (1) A personal philosophy of group work training, where the author assumes a position about what group work means. (2) A Course description, which included the goals and objectives and the Instructional and the didactic strategies, and other support resources. (3) Format of class meetings that explains what assignments and activities are used in fomenting the learning experience. (4) Appendix I, which describes The Curve-shaped Model that supported the syllabus design and the class schedule.

Key words: Group work, type of groups, balance, content, process.

Entrenamiento de Orientadores en Trabajo Grupal: Un Syllabus

Resumen

Este artículo describe un syllabus de un curso introductorio sobre Trabajo de Grupos para los niveles de Maestría y doctorado en Orientación y profesiones afines. El artículo se basa en las tendencias actuales del entrenamiento de especialistas en trabajo

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grupales, representadas por la Sociedad Norteamericana de Especialistas en Trabajo de Grupos (ASGW, siglas en Inglés). Este syllabus contiene: (1) La filosofía personal sobre el entrenamiento en trabajo de grupo, en la cual el autor asume una posición sobre el trabajo de grupo y su significado. (2) La descripción del curso, que incluye las metas y objetivos, las estrategias instruccionales y didácticas utilizadas y otros recursos. (3) Formato de las reuniones de clases, donde se explican las tareas y actividades empleadas para fomentar la experiencia de aprendizaje. (4) APENDICE I, el cual expone EL Modelo de Campana que soporta el diseño del curso y la tabla de organización de cada clase.

Palabra clave: Trabajo de grupo, tipos de grupos, balance, contenido, proceso.

Introduction

Group work is a broad and multidimensional professional practice that is understood as a subspecialty within the counseling profession (Gladding, 1996). As such, counselors can expect to lead task, psychoeducational, counseling, and therapy groups across a range of settings. The challenge in teaching and training is to prepare counselors to work effectively within diverse settings. The professional Standard for the Training of group Workers, published by the Association for Specialist in Group Work in 1991, specified group work competencies and the ways to supervise experiences that attend to the practice of comprehensive group work.

1. Personal Philosophy of Group Work Training

Counselors should be prepared to effectively deliver group intervention in diverse traditional and non-traditional settings. Therefore, during the students' academic journey, they should receive comprehensive train-

ing in group work (Coney, Wilson & Ward, 1997). This training should include not only group work current knowledge and competencies, but also provide an opportunity for students to explore their social and interpersonal skills and growth as persons as well. The group work training should create a learning environment where students can obtain more than knowledge. In fact, it should be a human encounter, where students gain valuable insights and experiences that make them able to cognitively and emotionally understand and properly apply group work expertise in the context of interpersonal relationships that take place in a larger world.

Accordingly, group work training should provide experiential activities that facilitate personal awareness, acquisition of group knowledge and skills. The group learning outcomes should be transferable and applicable to society. The dynamic of the experiential components help the students to be individually engaged in the process of discovering complex notions, competencies, and other contents re-

lated to group work, as well as to facilitate the understanding of the links between the class group work and the real world. In addition, the experiential activities may foster the students' awareness of the role that their personality plays in delivering group work. Likewise, group work training should also promote the students' exploration and definition of their personal beliefs, values, biases, diversity issues, and interpersonal skills that may be resources or obstacles in the task of becoming group work experts.

Finally, group work training should foster an intentional process for students to grow progressively, personally and professionally, in managing group work situations in diverse settings and populations. Group work training should be taught in terms of Process, Content, and Balance, where Balance is the key element of expertise for becoming a fine group work specialist (Coney, Wilson & Ward, 1997). The training group work should also follow the ASGW Professional Standards for the Training of Group Workers (1991).

2. Course Description

The introductory group work training is designed to provide a comprehensive view of group work according to different types of groups defined by the Association for Specialists in Group Work: Task, Psychoeducational, Counseling, and Therapy. Likewise, this introductory course follows the ASGW recommen-

dations for the training and education of group work specialists. Therefore, this course is designed to: (a) Provide basic knowledge about leadership, membership, and interrelationship by diverse didactic and experiential strategies; (b) Create a space for discussing diversity issues by group activities; (c) Discuss ethical issues that emerge from different group work scenarios; (d) Facilitate the students' self-exploration in the context of group process by diverse, creative and written activities; (f) Engage the students in playing the roles of co-leader, group member, and process observer through diverse group exercises; and (g) Integrate group knowledge and skills by experiential strategies. Because of this training, the students will be able to understand how effective group work operates from its theoretical foundations and from current development that is emerging from the practice of group work in different scenarios. In addition, the students will start to develop their personal philosophy of group work from their own experience in this training course and from their Counseling background. Consequently, they will be better equipped to face advanced training in Group Work in their further development as a group work specialist.

Course Main Goals

During the learning experiences provided by this course, the students will be able to:

1. Understand the history and modern status of group work.
2. Study cognitive maps about interpersonal, intrapersonal, and group interventions.
3. Discuss current research findings in the group work field.
4. Learn about the role that Ethics plays in group work.
5. Learn how group process is presented in any group work.
6. Understand the dynamic immersed in the creation of a community of learners.
7. Learn how the interpersonal learning in groups is transferable to larger scenarios, such as community, school, workplace, family, and others.
8. Examine some characteristics of effective group leaders in diverse settings.
9. Learn how theory of group is linked to the practice of group work and its diverse roles.
10. Understand how group work can be used in elementary schools and colleges.
5. Learn current theoretical frames for visualizing and conceptualizing group work.
6. Apply group process, knowledge, strategies, and techniques in working with task groups, psycho-educational groups, and therapy groups.
7. Use group work for doing early intervention, postvention, wellness, and empowerment.
8. Review some research findings in the field of group work.
9. Obtain personal insights about the roles of leader, group member, and process observer.
10. Apply some specific leadership skills to a group situation.
11. Identify the core leadership competencies.
12. Explore how the individual's interpersonal dimension operates in group work.
13. Design a group intervention program.
14. Learn about current literature and audiovisual aids in the field of group work.
15. Gain awareness of some social and ecological factors that are presented in group work.

Course Objectives

As result of this group work training, you will:

1. Learn key details about the history of groups.
2. Learn how to define group work.
3. Learn how and why groups work in small and larger worlds.
4. Learn about the Ethics of group work in diverse populations, purposes, and settings.

Instructional and Didactic Strategies

For accomplishing the course educational objectives, several instructional methods and strategies are used. The learning experience includes the following modalities:

1. Lectures and Small group interactive discussions.
2. Reading of handouts, referenced bibliography, and other written materials.
3. Writing assignments on diverse group work topics and class experiences.
4. Active participation in group class experience.
5. Feedback exchanges and opens reaction toward the group experience.
6. Commentary on each class from a process observer.

Required Texts

Donigian, J., & Hulse-Killacky, D. (1999). **Critical incidents in group therapy** (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Trotzer, J.P. (1999). **The Counselor and the group** (3rd ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Accelerated Development.

Optional Texts

Capuzzi, D., & Gross, D.R. (1998). **Introduction to group counseling** (2nd ed.). Denver, CO: Love

Gladding, S. (1999) **Group work: A counseling specialty** (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company.

Yalom, I., D. (1995). **The theory and practice of group psychotherapy** (4th ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Jacobs, E. E., Masson, R.L., & Harvill, R.L. (1998). **Group counseling: Strategies skills** (3rd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Recommended Journals

- Journal of Counseling & Development (ACA publication)
- Journal for Specialist in Group Work (ASGW Publication)
- Professional School Counseling (ASCA Publications)

Recommended Websites

- American Counseling Association (ACA) at: <http://www.counseling.org/>
- Association for Specialist in Group Work (ASGW) at: <http://coe.colstate.edu/asgw/>
- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) at: <http://www.siu.edu/~epse1/aces/>

3. Format of Class Meetings

Because this course is one group work training, participants will work together to create a learning environment from where a community of learners will emerge. In addition, rules and definitions of the evaluation criteria for class participation will be built together.

Course Requirements

1. **Class Participation.** It will be discussed and defined by the class. A group consensual agreement addressing confidentiality, participation, attendance, and other aspects of the group functioning will take place. It will also be written, and distributed among the participants.
2. **Feedback Interchange:** Because this experience is the shared responsibility of a community of learners, each of us will use feedback interchange as a tool for fostering personal and interpersonal learning. You will have the opportunity to be a feedback giver and receiver.
3. **Personal Story Paper.** You will have the opportunity to reflect and communicate some details about your origins. You will be asked to write a brief personal paper (2-6 pages) on your family, your cultural background, and your personal development as an individual. The assignment will help you to examine how some of your actual emotional, thought, and behavior features were developed. Therefore, you will have a window for understanding your interrelationship behaviors as a group member. Additionally, this assignment will help in further steps in the course assignments. You must follow the APA style manual (4th edition).
4. **Leadership Paper.** You will identify a leadership issue that presently seems to be the most challenging one for you to face. You will focus the issue in the form of group: therapy, counseling, task, or psychoeducational. You will need to do some group research reading. Later, you will present ways that you might address your selected issue. You are expected to reflect on how, in working with this assignment, your abilities to address the issue have changed as well as how you plan to apply what you have learned in future group settings. Please follow the APA style. Be sure to limit your paper to 5 to 7 pages.
5. **Reaction Papers.** You will write three reaction papers during this course. The reaction papers are tools by which you will reflect on your experience in this course during the semester. You will select the topic during the timeframe that the paper covers and discuss your thoughts, feelings, and personal significance of it. It is important that you describe the impact that the particular theme or topic is having on you. Each reaction paper belongs to a particular phase of the group, and then will be a reaction paper for the Warm-up phase, the Working phase, and the Closure phase. These papers should be between 10 to 15 pages long each. Use APA style and check your Assignments Schedule for due dates.
6. **Outside Group Experience.** This experiential component will

help you to gain first hand experience about group membership, leadership, and other group transactions. You will participate in five small groups outside the class. Experienced leaders will lead these groups and you will have the opportunity to learn about group dynamics, transitions, interpersonal relationships, leadership techniques, and other process oriented group phenomena. You will also have the chance to engage in feedback interchange as a giver and a receiver. Because of your participation in this outside group, you will gain personal insights about you as a group member (who Am I?); will be able to better understand other group members (Who are you?); and will discover how you and the rest of the group members interact in the group (Who are we together?). Additionally, you will be able to understand how group process can inform your work in diverse group settings. A process observer will also be present in each group session.

7. **In-Class Groups.** Another experiential component that will help you to develop leadership skills and knowledge. Likewise, you will have the opportunity to be a group member and observer of a group action. This experience will help you to better understand how a group moves through different stages of growth and development. You will have the opportu-

nity to integrate all this in-group experience by pre-group planning sessions, in-class feedback interchange, written reflection reports, and supervision sessions. This session will be videotaped so the in-group leaders will have the opportunity to review each session and write a short reaction paper to it, addressing the following questions: What were the leader's goals for the session and how were those accomplished?

8. **Group Proposal:** You will have the opportunity to develop a group proposal as your final written assignment, 10-12 pages, APA style. For the proposal, you will select a type of group and a setting where you would like to implement your group program. You need to select your group proposal according to the specialty areas described by ASGW. You are free to select the timing and duration of your group; it can be a single session of several hours or a series of sessions. Since this assignment will help you to demonstrate your knowledge of group process, you will need to address the following key elements in your proposal:
- Your paper background and rationale
 - Use the academic literature in the proposal
 - Objectives for the group and logistics details
 - Conceptual and visual map that will support your group proposal

- Leadership roles and functions
 - Strategies for terminating and appraising evaluation of the group effectiveness.
 - Evaluation and Feedback: provide details about how you plan to handle those participants who might show signs of progress resistance or those who might be harmed by the group experience.
 - Research Questions: You will need to develop several research questions that will help you to further understand the process, the changes, and the group outcomes. Describe how you will proceed in answering the research questions.
 - Interpersonal Learning: You will need to define and put into place ways that will help the group members translate interpersonal learning from within the group to outside the group.
9. **Article Critique.** You will critique a group research article related to the type of group that you are preparing. This is going to help you to inform your group proposal (see Assignment 8). An outline and discussion on how to do this assignment will be provided to the group. You will have the opportunity to briefly present your critique to the rest of the group. Please attach a copy of the article to your paper.
10. **Paper on Endings.** One of the critical components of any group is the closure phase of it. You will write a three-page paper to ad-

dress your reaction to several issues related to endings. You will reflect on how you personally manage endings, what values and assumptions, biases, and feelings you might experience during ending processes. You will also discuss how you might approach your personal endings to this group class and project how your approach might be applied in a larger world.

11. **Group Portfolio.** The objective of this assignment is to facilitate your analysis of your academic and learning experience in this course and to assess your grade. You will organize your portfolio with all the written work that you have done in this course and any other information that shows your work. Please include a summary about your work in this term and recommend the grade that you believe you have earned. Use the next table for assigning specific points to each category.

Category to Assess	Weights
Attendance and Class Participation	20
Personal Story Paper	20
Group Proposal	15
Article Critique	15
Leadership Paper	10
Paper on Endings	10
Reaction Papers	10

Final remarks

Please feel free to contact me if you think that you are not going to meet an assignment deadline. I will be open to discuss any extension that might be needed. For more details, please review APPENDIX I.

APPENDIX I

The Appendix I was pedagogically developed based on the Bell-Shaped Curve Model (Hulse-Killacky, D., Kraus, K.L., & Schumacher, R. 1999). (See the model in Appendix I, part 1). The model provides a rationale that lets us understand conceptually and visually how group work really operates, facilitating the use of the notions of Balance, Process, and Content for managing and developing the group's class flow. The model also lets us understand that the group work class *is a group* where three major phases occur: the Warm Up phase, the Working phase, and the Closure phase by which several interactions and learning processes take place. For example, in the **Warm-up phase**, some interactive experiences are *initiated* to empower the life of the group, using focus questions such as "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we together?" In this phase, basic conditions are established to gener-

ate a learning environment where members can feel safe enough to engage collaboratively in the group learning experience. Next is the **Working phase**, during which intensive work-together, discoveries of personal meanings, group knowledge, and feedback interchanges take place. Thus, you will gain insight and knowledge about yourself as a social individual, the scope of group work, membership, and leadership. Following the working phase is the **Closure Phase**. In this phase, you will expand your understanding of how to deal with termination, closure, and safety issues, personally and socially from the context of the group. In addition, you will obtain some details on current trends in group research, designing, and planning.

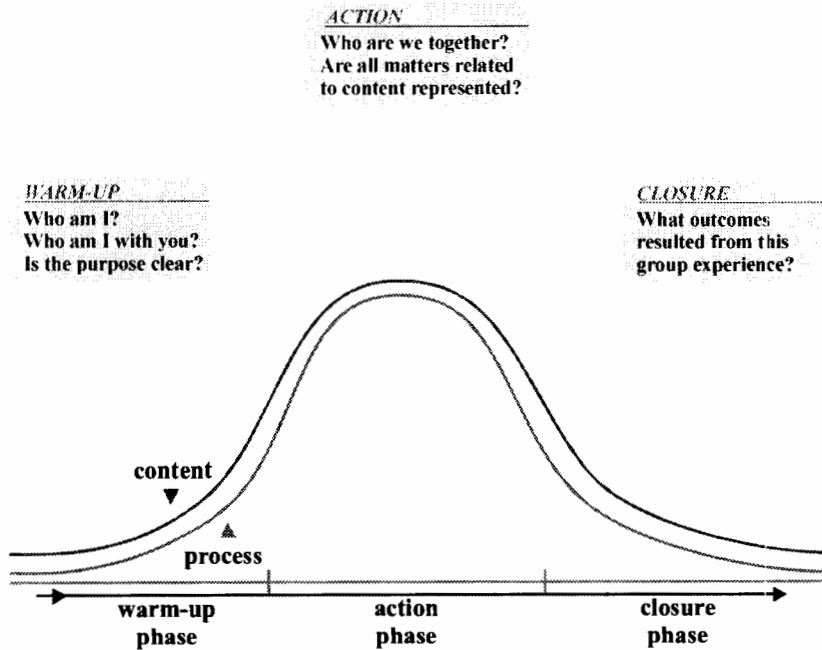
The Appendix I, from part 2 to 4, also contains the *Class Schedule*. The schedule is divided into four parts, from the left to the right: The **CLASS** indicates the number of session, 16 in total. The **TOPICS** include the major content and process to be focused on during the teaching work. The **ACTIVITY** briefly describes the didactic strategies by which the learning experience will take place. The **READINGS** part indicates what material should be read in order to gain the specialized knowledge required for this introductory course.

The Bell-Shaped Curve Model

Appendix I

Hulse-Killacky, D., Kraus, K. L., & Schumacher, R. (1999)

(Part I)



CLASS SCHEDULE Warm-up Phase

Appendix I
(Part 2)

CLASS	TOPICS	ACTIVITY	READINGS
1	Introduction & Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploration of the Participants' expectations and initiation of participants' process. - Presentation and discussion of the group syllabus. - Overview of the Group History and Dynamics as a multidimensional discipline. - Assignments: Personal Story Paper. 	- Trotzer: 1, 2
2	Feedback, Leadership & Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small group discussion on Ethics. - Group reaction to handouts in leadership. - Outside group preparation. - Outside group activities start. - Discussion on feedback, distribution of Killackey's C.F.I. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killackey, D: 1, 2 - Trotzer: 3
3	Feedback, The Bell Shaped Model & Ethics and Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychoeducational group & Task groups: definitions, ethics, and procedures. - Professor introduction of the Bell Shaped Model. - Feedback and C.F.I. Discussion on results. - Second Outside group meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killackey, D: 3, 4 - Trotzer: 4
4	The Bell Shaped, Balance, Process Content Ethics and Groups & Yalom Notions on Leadership and Group Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small group discussion on Yalom's notions, handouts. - Group discussion on Therapy groups and Counseling groups: definitions, ethics, and procedures. - Professor lecture about the notions of process, balance, and content in the Bell Shaped Model. - Third Outside Group meeting. - Reaction Paper (warm up phase) due. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killackey, D: 5 - Trotzer: 5

CLASS	TOPICS	ACTIVITY	READINGS
5	Group Effectiveness & Leaders Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small group discussion on Leaders' characteristics & Group Effectiveness; Handout. - Large group discussion on Effectiveness. - Fourth outside group meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 6 - Trotzer: 6
6	Leadership & Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group members pair off to discuss membership, handouts. - Large group discussion on leadership and membership. - Leadership paper due. - Fifth outside group meeting (closure). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 7 - Trotzer: 7
7	Issues on Leadership & Multicultural and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback and experiences exchange on outside group. - Small Group discussion on multicultural issues in leadership and some ethical issues. - First in-Group section. - In-Group preparation: organization and selection of topics and co-leaders. - Reaction Paper (working phase). - After Class meeting with first paired off co-leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 8, 9 - Trotzer: 8
8	Group work in diverse settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lecture on group work in different settings: educational institutions, hospitals, mental health facilities, churches, businesses (first part) - Small group discussion on group proposal. - In-group first session. - After class meeting with co-leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 10, 11 - Trotzer: 9
9	Group work in a larger World of Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class discussion on ASGW guidelines on group worker preparation. Handout. - Small Group discussion on the counselor and the Group, expectations, prospective, and needs. - In-group second session. - After class meeting with co-leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 12, 13 - Trotzer: 10, 11
10	Group work Assessment and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lecture on group work in different settings: educational institutions, hospitals, mental health facilities, churches, business.(second part) - Small group discussion on group proposal. - In-group third session. - After class meeting with co-leaders. - Reaction Paper (working phase) due. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 14, 15 - Trotzer: 12

CLASS SCHEDULE Closure Phase

**Appendix I
(Part 4)**

CLASS	TOPICS	ACTIVITY	READINGS
11	Group Work Dynamics and Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small Group discussion on handouts with the select topics for this session. - Introduction on endings and termination. - Fourth in-group session. - After class meeting with co-leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 16 - Trotzer: 13
12	Personal Endings & Group Termination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair work to discuss handout on personal endings and closure. - Large group debriefs on endings and group closure. - Fifth in-group session. - After class meeting with co-leaders. - Article Critique due. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 17 - Trotzer: 14
13	Group work and Research for the continuous improvement of group practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small Group discussion on varied issues on theories and research on group work and its application in diverse settings. - In group sixth session (closure). - Feedback interchange on the evaluation of this group class so far. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 18, 19 - Trotzer: 15
14	Group work Specialists' Personal and Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debrief the in-group experiences: Recommendations, expectations, and evaluation. - Large group discussion on issues related to the group work specialist commitment and development as a professional and social individual. - Paper on Endings Due. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donigian & Killacky, D: 20
15	Safety and Follow-up issues on Group work planning and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small group discussion on issues related to group members' safety before, during, and after. - Larger group discussion on safety and follow up issues when a group work intervention is in the planning and implementation process. - Group Proposal Paper due. 	
16	Group Class Evaluation, Individual Purposes and Group Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large group discussion on the group class overall experience, personal message interchanges among participants. - Logical and Psychological closure activity. - Writing evaluation of the group class. 	

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