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Neophyte Group Therapists (NGTs): Needs, Training, and Supervision

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Throughout the meeting, there was an emphasis on the philosophical roots of community counseling, and how those roots may be in concert or conflict with other counseling identities. The dialogue ultimately resulted in a focus on the role of counselor educators and supervisors in communicating a strong identity to students, the overall profession of counseling, as well as the society in which we practice. As such, the SACES Community Counseling Interest Network extends an invitation to all faculty members in counseling programs to participate in the development of this interest network vision. We will be discussing these issues in Columbus at the upcoming ACES Convention. Our session is titled **“Community, Clinical, and Mental Health Counseling Specialties: Working to Establish a Solid Counselor Identity.”** Please join colleagues for an exchange of ideas for counseling faculty to discuss the current state of our programs. Our goal is to encourage a united voice across all community/mental health/clinical counseling faculty. How can we work together as counselor educators to ensure a shared vision in light of the 2008 CACREP revisions? What would that vision look like, and is it achievable?

Finally, at this year’s ACA Convention in Detroit, members of the ACES Community Counseling and Mental Health Interest Networks joined together for a dialogue about what the 2008 CACREP standard revisions mean for the future of community and mental health counseling. As a result, we have put together a very brief survey of attitudes regarding proposed changes to these programs. Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts with us. You can find the informed consent and survey at the following link: <http://www.counselingsurveys.org/do.php?survey=s132152>. We plan to share the results at our session in Columbus.

Thank you!

Neophyte Group Therapists: Needs, Training, and Supervision

-Amanda J. Rockinson-Szapkiq, Lucinda C. West, & Anita M. Castillanos, Regent University; and L. Zoe Payne, Northern Arizona University

In the United States, utilization of group therapy as a treatment modality continues to expand (Christensen & Kline, 2001). Despite the growth, three factors adversely impact the future utilization of group therapy: (a) the training requirements of group therapists is not consistent across mental health disciplines, (b) the availability of group work training is incongruent with the demand of group therapists, and © little empirical data exists on current training methods and supervision models for group work (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 2001; Rubel & Atieno Okech, 2006). Therefore, as counselor educators and supervisors, it would serve us well to consider the needs, training, and supervision of novice group therapists. Through our own educational and training processes, we discovered practical, effective ideas and methods we want to share.

“Our goal is to encourage a united voice across all community/mental health/clinical counseling faculty..”



“The first contract with the search committee will often be a phone interview so BE PREPARED.”

Neophyte Group Therapists, cont'd

To facilitate discussion of the challenges and needs of neophyte group therapists, we could look at the operational definition; however, no such definition appears in the limited literature. References to neophyte group therapists include “inexperienced,” “beginning group therapists,” “supervisees,” and “trainees” (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 2001; Gallagher, 1994; Yalom, 1966). For our purposes, the term neophyte group therapist (NGT) will be defined as an inexperienced individual who is training to be a group therapist.

In our experience, we found that NGTs usually experience anxiety about primary challenges. Some say they have difficulties tracking multiple clients and become overwhelmed, express a sense of being inadequately prepared to run groups. And indicate they do not have needed skills and have difficulty conceptualizing group processes and group dynamics. Some NGTs experience intense guilt and sense of failure when group members drop out. And if the supervisor or educator does not address the feelings and skill needs of an NGT, the group could depreciate and group members could be harmed. Education and supervision which address NGTs' needs could vitally influence the development of effective group therapists and the promotion of quality group work.

To serve as a framework in the training of NGTs, two models are helpful.

- (1) Gallagher's (1994) “dynamic group psychotherapy” model of supervision focuses on meeting the developmental needs of trainees. This model conceptualizes supervision in three hierarchical, sequential stages—technical, enrichment, and personal—and proposes different needs and strengths of supervisors and supervisees at each stage.
- (2) A second supervision model, a conceptual system that fuses aspects of the discrimination model and group systemic levels, offers supervisors of NGTs a framework for making decisions about the supervision focus and the role of the supervisor (Rubel & Atineo Okech, 2006).

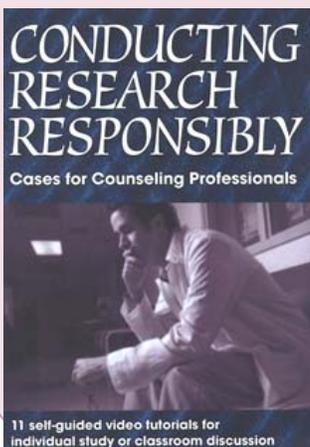
In consideration of these models and response to NGTs' needs, we have found the following methods of intervention useful:

- ◆ Develop an empathic rapport. Empathic rapport is key to an effective working relationship. When present in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the supervisee feels safe to think, reflect, and tolerate uncertainty.
- ◆ Be real and open. By disclosing your own relevant experiences, you normalize the trainee's experiences and feelings.

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- ◆ Utilize skill training that accounts for the various learning styles of each NGT. Some NGTs learn by observing and others learn by doing. Ask your NGT how he/she learns best.
- ◆ Encourage self-reflection through the usage of journals and discussion on video-taped sessions. Other methods of self-reflection include letters to oneself, self-evaluations, and a learning log.
- ◆ Discuss case scenarios. Develop case scenario cards and discuss how the NGT might feel and act in each case. Discuss “What if...”

While this is just a brief summary of the challenges and needs of NGTs and the potential models of supervision, some recommended training interventions are provided. However, further identification of the needs and challenges of the NGT, and effective training interventions and models are warranted. A distinct need for additional research to ensure the quality of the development of NGTs, their group training and supervision, and the promotion of quality group work exists.

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SACES Women's Interest Network

During this past year, the SACES Women's Interest Network has been attempted to revive itself! A meeting took place at the SACES conference in Orlando to discuss next steps. The individuals at the meeting discussed aspects around being proactive, creating mentoring relationships, and getting together at conferences. Thus, a SACES Women's Networking meeting/get-together will take place at the ACES conference in Columbus, Ohio this fall. Please stay tuned for more details and information. Currently there is a “group” email for those who are members of the SACES Women's Interest Network. If you are interested in being part of this “group” email—or if you have any ideas or suggestions for the network, please email Heather Trepal heather.trepal@utsa.edu.

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If you would like to contribute anything to future editions of the SACES Newsletter, please contact Kelly L. Wester, 2006-2007 SACES Newsletter editor at klwester@uncg.edu

