*Level 2*

| The consultant expresses confidence in the plan and the consultee's strengths in implementing the plan. | "I think you've really put together a good plan of action." "I think you've got a good chance of being successful because you'll be able to——" |
|---|---|

*Level 3*

| The consultant summarizes part of the problem-resolution process used in the session, and reviews what took place in one of the steps. | "We've used a problem-resolution process in our work together. We went through several steps in devising a plan of action." "During the step of ——, we spent time ——" |
|---|---|

*Level 4*

| The consultant checks-in regarding the work that was done together and suggests learning more about problem solving in future work together. | "How do you feel about the work we've done together?" "Let's talk about problem-solving some more when we get together." |
|---|---|

*Group counseling specialists have been in need of a group counseling skill classification system ever since the acceptance of group methods as effective techniques for helping. A classification system would assist group counselors in training, research, application, and evaluation. Of particular importance is the classification of skills that are unique to the group approach. This article reviews selected classification schemes presented by other authors and then presents the authors' own classification system which organizes operational definitions of group-focused skills. The purpose of this article is to stimulate identification, development, and validation of group counseling competencies.*

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# *Group-Focused Counseling: Classifying the Essential Skills*

"I'm comfortable counseling with one person, but I don't feel comfortable leading a group." "What should I do when someone in the group says . . . ?" "How will I know when I'm ready to lead a group?"

Every trainer of group counselors and most group counseling trainees have been either the sender or receiver of these statements. Often they symbolize the anxiety that counselors-in-training feel when learning new helping methods. However, these statements also indicate a plea for abilities—a wish that group counseling could be defined as a set of skills which, when learned, give an individual the competency to be an effective group facilitator.

Current activities within the profession indicate that counselor educators consider this issue to be critical and in need of discussion. For example: The Association for Specialists in

Group Work is actively engaged in establishing standards of competency for group counselors; recently Dye (1980) wrote about a need for clarity regarding what group counselors do and how they learn to do it; and the editor of the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* invited proposals for a special issue on the "training of group leaders" (Conyne, 1980, p. 3).

This concern about the competencies of group leaders has existed since the proliferation of group experiences in the 1960s (Feinberg, 1977; Hogan, 1977, Lakin, 1972; Massarik, 1972). In fact, a recognition that leaders who do not have certain group facilitation abilities may cause harmful experiences for group participants (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973) has led to a disenchantment with groups and group counselor training (Corazzini & Anderson, 1980).

The efficacy of small group counseling for helping people change attitudes, values, and behavior is well documented (Bergin & Garfield, 1971; Fullmer, 1978; Ohlsen, 1977; Yalom, 1979). A question that has yet to be answered is: What are the essential skills in which all group counselors need competency? Of course, the specific approach and strategies to be used in a group will be determined by the setting, client characteristics, and goals of that group. However, an identification of basic group helping behaviors will contribute enormously to the training and development of group counselors. The purpose of this article is to stimulate discussion and inves-

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tigations that will contribute to the identification of essential group counseling skills. We review selected classification systems and present our own system, which is currently under study.

A classification of essential group facilitation skills has a number of potentially significant benefits for the field of counseling. Goals and objectives of counselor training programs could become clearer and thus facilitate learning and a sense of trainee accomplishment. With their tools and procedures "visible," counselors will be more accountable for their professional behavior. This increased accountability should lead to greater counselor involvement in professional development. A classification system could also provide a competency basis for credentialing counselors, recognizing counselors for what they can do, as opposed to how they were trained. Also, specificity of desired skills would enable researchers to more adequately observe and measure the performance and outcomes of group counseling behaviors.

The classification of counseling skills for training and research purposes is not new. An analysis of the essential components of individual counseling has progressed from the isolation and description of core conditions (Rogers, 1951), to operational definitions of facilitative behaviors (Carkhuff, 1969), to videotape models of specific counseling skills (Ivey & Authier, 1978). However, even though many one-to-one, counseling skills have been defined, observed, measured, and taught with success, additional skills are needed for counseling in groups. Group processes are different from one-to-one interactions; skills relevant to these group processes need to be operationalized for teaching purposes.

There have been some isolated attempts at classifying behaviors essential to group work. Ivey (1973), from his own experience in group counseling and his observations of group leaders, proposed a taxonomy of group skills (see Table 1). This taxonomy consists of 10 skills basic to individual counseling, plus the following four "phases" of skill focus: group, individual, self, and topic. By adding these four phases with-

out altering the skills, Ivey implies that these skills are the same in both individual and group counseling. Sherrard (1973) tested the Ivey taxonomy for its usefulness in measuring group leader behavior. He found the taxonomy to be useful, but emphasized that more research was needed to test the validity of the classification scheme in relation to group counseling effectiveness.

Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles (1973) generated a list of what they believed to be essential group facilitation skills from data collected in a large, comprehensive study of encounter groups. They studied 17 group leaders whose theoretical backgrounds were wide-ranging, including: Gestalt, Transactional Analysis, Rogerian, Personal Growth, Psychodrama, T-Group, and Psychoanalytic. The members of the groups were college students. Four basic leadership functions were found to account for 74% of the activities of the group leaders in the study; these four functions were emotional stimulation, caring, meaning attribution, and executive function. Each of these leadership functions was further defined in terms of more specific behaviors. A list is presented in Table 1.

Dyer and Vriend (1977) identified 20 behaviors for group leader mastery (see Table 1). This listing is based on their experience with groups rather than a systematic investigation of group counseling. The authors emphasize their belief that these skills are important because they "work." The terms and definitions are similar to skills that have traditionally been associated with individual counseling. While the list appears to contain important competencies for counselors, it does not include behaviors that are unique to group work.

Ohlsen (1977) offers a classification system and a recommendation regarding the identification of essential group counseling skills. He suggests that such skills be identified by selecting outstanding group counselors and then making videotapes of their sessions to be analyzed for the identifiable, essential skills. Because this research has not been done, Ohlsen chose to complete an extensive review of the literature and drew on this plus his own eclectic experience with group

## TABLE 1
### Group Counseling Skill Classification Systems

| Ivey (1971) | Lieberman, Yalom and Miles (1973) | Dyer and Vriend (1977) | Ohlsen (1977) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. minimal encouragers | 1. emotional stimulation | 1. identifying, labeling, clarifying, and reflecting feeling | 1. developing readiness |
| 2. open questions |   a. revealing feelings, beliefs | 2. identifying, labeling, clarifying and reflecting behavioral data | 2. relationship building |
| 3. closed questions |   b. confrontation | 3. identifying, labeling, clarifying and reflecting cognitive data | 3. relationship maintaining |
| 4. paraphrase |   c. stylistically emoting | 4. questioning, drawing out and evoking material appropriate for counseling focus | 4. problem identification |
| 5. reflection of feeling |   d. risktaking | 5. confronting | 5. definition of counseling |
| 6. summary | 2. caring | 6. summarizing and reviewing important material | 6. definition of criteria to appraise client's growth |
| 7. directions |   a. friendship | 7. interpreting | 7. resistance |
| 8. expression of content |   b. love, affection | 8. restating | 8. countertransference |
| 9. expression of feelings |   c. acceptance, support, praise | 9. establishing connections | 9. feedback |
| 10. cognitive restructure |   d. invitation to seek feedback | 10. information giving | 10. termination |
| | 3. meaning attribution | 11. initiating | |
| 1. group focus |   a. explaining | 12. reassuring, encouraging, and supporting | |
| 2. individual focus |   b. cognitizing behavior | 13. intervening | |
| 3. self focus |   c. interpreting of reality | 14. dealing with silence | |
| 4. topic focus |   d. labeling behaviors | 15. recognizing and explaining nonverbal behavior | |
| | 4. executive function | 16. using clear, concise, meaningful communications | |
| |   a. limit setting | 17. focusing | |
| |   b. rules, norms setting | 18. restraining, subduing, and avoiding potentially explosive and divisive of group happenings | |
| |   c. goal setting | 19. goal setting | |
| |   d. group management | 20. facilitating closure | |

counseling to develop a list of 10 facilitative behaviors for group leaders (see Table 1).

Each of the selected classification systems described above contributes to a general understanding of counseling skills. However, the authors believe that to be maximally useful for skill training and research a group counseling skills classification system must meet certain criteria. The system should provide a practical and integrating framework that tells trainees what to do, yet is still open to borrowing from various theories and approaches (Egan, 1975). In addition, the classification system should be comprised of behaviors that are appropriate, operational, developmentally related, and group-focused. The behaviors should be appropriate to the role and function of a counselor as group facilitator—one whose primary purpose is to create an environment conducive to learning and change. The behaviors should be operational for purposes of skill training and research. In other words, they should be stated in terms that allow definition, observation, and measurement. Also, the behaviors should be developmentally related for the reasons suggested by Egan (1975) when he defined a developmental model as a framework "composed of progressive interdependent stages" (p. 28). The developmental framework provides the trainee with a picture of the order in which skills should be learned and used, as well as how they complement each other.

Another criterion for a useful group counseling skill classification system is that the skills be group-focused. In other words, they respond to the groups as a whole. This may seem like an obvious qualification, but group counselors do not typically make use of group process as a source of learning and change. Rather, the leader uses individual counseling techniques to help one person at a time within a group setting. These individual-focused counseling skills have been described extensively in the counseling literature. If counselors wish to utilize the group as a medium for learning and change, dynamics such as group member interaction, group support, group decision making, and group problem solving need greater attention.

In summary, the authors suggest the following selection criteria for building a system of group counseling skills:

*1 Appropriate.* The behavior can reasonably be attributed to the role and function of a group counselor.

*2 Definable.* The behavior can be described in terms of human performance.

*3 Observable.* Experienced as well as inexperienced observers can identify the behavior when it occurs. The behavior can be repeated in like form by different people in different settings.

*4 Measurable.* Objective recording of both the frequency and quality of the behavior can occur with a high degree of agreement among observers.

*5 Developmental.* The behavior can be placed within the context of a progressive relationship with other skills, all contributing to movement of the group toward its goals. The effectiveness of the behaviors at one stage in the counseling process is dependent on the effectiveness of the skills used at earlier stages.

*6 Group-focused.* The target of the behavior is the group, or more than one participant. The behavior is often related to an

### TABLE 2

### Classification System for Group-Focused Counseling Skills

| Stage I | Stage II | Stage III |
|---|---|---|
| *Group Formation:* Facilitating Cooperation Toward Common Goals Through Development of Group Identity | *Group Awareness:* Facilitating a Shared Understanding of the Group's Behavior | *Group Action:* Facilitating Cooperative Decision-Making and Problem-Solving |
| 1. *Norming* stating explicitly the expected group behavior | 1. *Labeling Group Behavior* identifying and describing group feelings and performance. | 1. *Identifying Group Needs* asking questions and making statements which clarify the want and needs of the group. |
| 2. *Eliciting Group Responses* inquiries or invitations to members which encourage comments, questions, or observations. | 2. *Implicit Norming* describing behavior which has become typical of the group through common practice. | 2. *Identifying Group Goals* asking questions and making statements which clarify group objectives. |
| 3. *Eliciting Sympathic Reactions* inquiries or invitations to members which encourage disclosure of experiences or feelings similar to those being expressed. | 3. *Eliciting Group Observations* inquiries or invitation to members which encourage observations about group process. | 3. *Attributing Meaning* providing concepts for understanding group thought, feelings, and behavior. |
| 4. *Identifying Commonalities and Differences* describing comparative characteristics of participants. | 4. *Eliciting Mutual Feedback* inquiries or invitations to members which encourage sharing of perceptions about each other's behavior. | 4. *Eliciting Alternatives* providing descriptions of possible courses of action and inviting members to contribute alternatives. |
| 5. *Eliciting Empathic Reactions* inquiries or invitations to members which encourage reflection of one member's expressed content or feeling. | 5. *Identifying Conflict* labeling discordant elements of communication between members. | 5. *Exploring Consequences* inquiries or invitations to the group which evaluate actions and potential outcomes. |
| 6. *Task Focusing* redirecting conversation to immediate objectives; restating themes being expressed by more than one member. | 6. *Identifying Non-Verbal Behavior* labeling unspoken communications between members (facial expression, posture, hand gestures, voice tone and intensity, etc.) | 6. *Consensus Testing* requesting group agreement on a decision or course of action. |
| | 7. *Validating* requesting group confirmation of the accuracy of leader or members' perceptions. | |
| | 8. *Transitioning* changing the group's focus on content or feelings being expressed. | |
| | 9. *Connecting* relating material from group events at a particular time or session to what is happening currently. | |
| | 10. *Extinguishing* ignoring, cutting-off, or diverting inappropriate talk or actions of members. | |

interaction between two or more participants. The terms *group, we,* or *us* may be used. The purpose of the behavior is to facilitate multiple interactions among participants, to encourage shared responsibility for helping to promote participation, or to invite cooperative problem solving and decision making.

Using the criteria listed above, we formulated a group counseling skill classification system (see Table 2). This system consists of a three stage developmental framework. Usually a counselor performs Stage I skills early in the group's life, as a sense of group identity and cohesion are forming. Counselors discuss what they expect from the group and what members expect from leaders and each other (norming). The counselor invites members to respond to the topic of the group (eliciting group responses) and to make comparisons between each other's experiences (eliciting sympatic reactions) and between each other's personal characteristics (identifying commonalities and differences). The counselor can invite members to share their understanding of another member's point-of-view (eliciting empathic reactions). Interspersed among these behaviors is the skill of keeping discussion and activity focused on the current topic, problem, or task of the group (task focusing).

Stage II skills are necessary as the group seeks to explore and understand its behavior and the effect that individual members are having on the group. The counselor brings significant interactions to the attention of the group (labeling group behavior, identifying conflict,, identifying nonverbal behavior) and requests members to involve themselves in this behavior (eliciting group observations, eliciting mutual feedback). The counselor may also seek to help the group by pointing out behaviors that members have come to expect of each other (implicit norming). There are also four group maintenance skills that are used most in Stage II but have a usefulness in all three stages (validating, transitioning, connecting, and extinguishing).

Stage III is a time when the group, having achieved an awareness of it's own behavior, plans an action which will be helpful to one or more participants. This planning is facilitated by counselor skills directed at the decision-making process (identifying group needs, identifying group goals, eliciting alternatives, exploring consequences, consensus testing). Sometimes needs, goals, and outcomes are not clearly understood by members and the counselor must interpret what appears to be the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of participants (attributing meaning).

This particular classification system has not been presented as the definitive description of group counseling skills. The purpose of the presentation is to stimulate discussion and investigations which will contribute to the identification of essential group counseling skills. Research is needed which will establish the validity of these group-focused counseling skills and modify components of the system for future use in counselor training.

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