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Section I: Professionals' Articles

The Corrective Feedback Microlab: An Experiential Group Exercise to facilitate the Giving and Receiving of Corrective Feedback

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Counseling students and trainees often participate in different group activities where feedback exchange occurs. Barriers to receiving corrective feedback, in particular, may make such exchanges difficult. The purpose of this article is to explore the use of the Corrective Feedback Microlab as a group pretraining exercise to help increase the healthy exchange of corrective feedback.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, Counselor training, Groups

Counseling and therapy groups have historically served as a means for helping individuals learn about themselves in relation to others (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Part of the therapeutic group process involves giving and receiving feedback to help develop awareness of self and awareness of self in relation to others. Group work competencies and skills are also essential in a variety of contexts outside the realm of “therapy” or “counseling” environments. Some examples include boardroom members in meetings, faculty meetings, teams (sports, task forces, etc.), classrooms, community groups, and advocacy groups, where one of the goals is to create environments where tasks can be accomplished in a climate of open communication (Hulse-Killacky, Orr, & Paradise, 2006; Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994; Wadsworth, 2008).

Therefore, skills for giving and receiving positive and corrective feedback are no longer limited to therapeutic settings (Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001; Killacky & Hulse-Killacky, 2004). Corrective feedback, in this paper, is defined as “...feedback intended to encourage thoughtful examination and/or to express the feedback giver’s perception of the need for change on the part of the receiver” (Morran, Stockton, & Bond, 1991, p. 410). Difficulties arise, however, in how people receive corrective feedback (Stockton & Morran, 1981). For example, defensiveness level is cited as one barrier to receiving corrective feedback (Argyris, 1968; Robison, Morran, & Stockton, 1980; Stockton &

Morran, 1980; Stockton, Morran, & Harris, 1991). Other potential factors influencing the reception of corrective feedback include group structure (Robison & Hardt, 1992), valence (positive or negative) of the feedback given, number of group sessions and order of delivery (Stockton & Morran, 1981), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), anxiety and self-esteem (Sullivan, 1976), and self-concept (Morran & Stockton, 1980).

Several concerns have been identified regarding the giving of corrective feedback within group supervision, which is often instituted by counseling programs. Although the authors referred to the feedback as constructive instead of corrective, some concerns regarding group supervision include the lack of corrective feedback in general, giving superficial feedback, and a lack of overall quality in corrective feedback as compared to individual or triadic supervision models (Wahesh, Kemer, Willis, & Schmidt, 2017). Being aware of the challenges and barriers to giving and receiving corrective feedback in group supervision can be helpful for counselor educators or supervisors who may be the first professionals to engage in providing feedback to students/trainees.

Counselor Training, Groups, and Feedback

Counselor education programs accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) provide counseling courses that must adhere and meet criteria of eight “common core curricular areas” (CACREP, 2016, p. 10). One common core curricular area is that of group

work which includes students taking part in 10 hours of small group participation (CACREP, 2016, Standard II.G.6.e). Additionally, counseling students enrolled in practicum and internship courses also participate in 1.5 hours of group supervision (CACREP, 2016, pp. 16-17) where students process and receive corrective feedback on their work with clients and/or students.

Pregroup training incorporates some form of activity with the intent to prepare group participants for the upcoming experience (Rohde & Stockton, 1994). From a clinical perspective, pregroup training may decrease the frequency of group therapy premature termination while reducing not only dropout rates but also anxiety regarding the group process (Tasca, Mcquaid, & Balfour, 2016). Pregroup training has also been identified as a method to assist group members in exploring anticipated consequences associated with giving corrective feedback (Robison, Stockton, Morran, & Uhl-Wagner, 1988). Also, Rose and Bednar (1980) explained that pretraining conducted in groups tends to be one of the most successful methods in terms of behavioral pretraining on increasing interpersonal interactions. Toth and Erwin (1998) explored the application of a microcounseling skills based program to teach feedback intervention skills. Results indicated that the six-stage microcounseling skills based training significantly improved evaluations associated with confidence in giving feedback (Toth & Erwin, 1998). Toth and Erwin also encouraged the development of other curriculum to be used to help with the teaching of corrective feedback exchange. Additionally, Osborn, Daninirsh, and Page (2003) highlighted how the use of pregroup training may help counseling students with the giving of corrective feedback when they begin experiential learning groups. Lastly, Marmarosh (2018) explained that “providing group member with feedback during the pregroup preparation and throughout the therapy process is also helpful to group members as they work to obtain their goals in the group” (p. 101).

Microlabs

One particularly focused pregroup exercise is the microlab. Microlabs involve group exercises lasting between one to three

hours (Anderson, 1981). Microlabs have been examined in the past to explore how such group experiences influenced group cohesion and self-disclosure (Crews & Melnick, 1976). Additionally, microlabs have been used to establish an environment for individuals to develop human relations skills (Anderson, 1981). For example, Liddle (1974) found that a 90-minute microlab resulted with immediate effects on the initiation of change with one’s attitude and behavior. Although not specifically called microlabs, the use of pregroup trainings that focus on preparing participants for the upcoming group process have shown to be beneficial to group members’ interactions (Rohde & Stockton, 1994).

The use of experiential group exercises have also helped facilitate many essential counseling skill development and awareness to include interpersonal awareness and relational insight (Kline, Falbaum, Pope, Hargraves, & Hundley, 1997). Additionally, qualitative researchers identified personal awareness and development as one theme that emerged from counseling graduate students’ reactions to participating in an experiential group process (Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, & Young, 2009). Ieva et al. (2009) further explained:

the personal self-awareness and development theme focused on the development of insight regarding one’s strengths and areas for growth. Additionally, the theme encompassed thoughts and feelings about engaging in the risk-taking process of sharing with others and how this influences relationships with others. (p. 357)

The purpose of this paper is to present a microlab experiential group exercise that can be used to facilitate discussions regarding the giving and receiving of corrective feedback in counselor training classes prior to their participation in groups associated with group counseling courses, and/or prior to practicum and/or internship supervision group initiation.

The Corrective Feedback Microlab

The Corrective Feedback Microlab (see Appendix A) is an experiential group exercise

facilitation tool designed by Hulse-Killacky (2000). The microlab was developed originally as an additional tool to use with the Corrective Feedback Instrument (CFI) (Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994) to promote conversation on the giving and receiving of corrective feedback. The Corrective Feedback Microlab provides a systematic way of identifying thoughts, feelings, behaviors (cognitive-behavioral process) and greatest concerns when preparing to give and receive corrective feedback. Directions and instructions associated with the process allow group members to fully prepare for group participation. A definition of corrective feedback, along with two examples, sets the stage for exploration of personal experiences with corrective feedback. Additionally, exploring childhood experiences and reactions to corrective feedback assist group members in identifying possible historical factors influencing current reactions to corrective feedback. The exploration of childhood experiences and reactions are not necessarily aimed at therapy focused activities, instead, the goal is to increase awareness of how such experiences may have impacted participant's initial reaction to receiving and giving corrective feedback in general. Specifically, the intent is to help group participants work on such reactions when giving or receiving corrective feedback. Finally, the Corrective Feedback Microlab guides group members to discuss ways in which they may give and receive corrective feedback more easily while also exploring learning points from the microlab exercise.

The Corrective Feedback Microlab's format and cognitive-behavioral process is grounded in support from previous research conducted in the area of giving and receiving feedback. For example, Morran et al. (1991) explained that engaging group participants in discussions of feelings associated with giving and receiving feedback may assist members in identifying that others share the same concerns as they do, thus increasing the comfort in giving and receiving feedback. Additionally, cognitive-behavioral interventions have also proved to be beneficial regarding the amount of corrective feedback shared (Robinson & Hardt, 1992). Robison and Hardt (1992) conducted a study where

they explored the effects of four different group structures on the anticipation of undesired outcomes of communicating corrective feedback. The four possible group combinations in the Robison and Hardt study: (a) behavioral group structure with discussion, (b) behavioral group structure without discussion, (c) cognitive-behavioral group structure with discussion, and (d) cognitive-behavioral group structure without discussion. Results indicated that the exchange or frequency of corrective feedback in groups will most likely be at its highest when using a cognitive-behavioral structured group with a discussion of the anticipated undesired outcomes of communicating corrective feedback.

Implications for Counselor Educators and Group Leaders Counselor Education Programs

Counselor educators who wish to encourage more discussion on the topic of corrective feedback can use the Corrective Feedback Microlab to facilitate such discussions. Counselor educators can also develop and implement other forms of pregroup training incorporating other topics. For example, Page and Hulse-Killacky (1999) suggested that training by use of the Corrective Feedback Self-Efficacy Instrument (CFSI) might demystify the process of giving corrective feedback. The Corrective Feedback Instrument – Revised (CFI-R) (Hulse-Killacky et al., 2006) is another tool that can be used in conjunction with the Corrective Feedback Microlab. The CFI-R is a 30 item, 6-point Likert scale instrument where participants indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree to questions related to giving and receiving or clarifying corrective feedback. An example of an item includes: "Giving corrective feedback to others makes me very uncomfortable" (Hulse-Killacky et al., 2006, p. 268).

Counselor trainees are encouraged to ask questions about feedback and to suggest or recommend such pregroup training events within their training program. Hulse-Killacky et al. (2006) identified how discussions about responses to the CFI-R assisted students to be aware that not everyone had similar reactions to the same items. In other words, students

realized that everyone did not respond in the same fashion. This realization may increase awareness of differences and diversity and the need to consider diversity when giving corrective feedback.

Counselors Who Work With Therapeutic and Task Groups

Exploring feelings and thoughts associated with giving and receiving corrective feedback early in the group process may increase the exchange and use of corrective feedback among members in therapeutic groups. Also, participating in a discussion using the Corrective Feedback Microlab may inform clients of interactions that are important to the group process and that others may have similar or different feelings associated with feedback exchanges. Bednar and Kaul (1994) mentioned that although pregroup training has been proven to be effective, it has not been determined what type of training to offer and when to offer it. However, the use of more structured experiential group processes may prove to be beneficial. For example, Osborn et al. (2003) provided recommendations based on a qualitative research study exploring student reactions/experiences in experiential group activities. Osborn et al. (2003) provided the following recommendations: (a) clarification of written instructions and a clear purpose to group experiences; (b) including an informed consent component to experiential groups; (c) training students on the giving and receiving of corrective feedback to include the use of pregroup training. Microlab discussions of corrective feedback, in particular, show promise in contributing to beliefs associated with communicating more clearly and acting on corrective feedback received (Dean, 2004). One potential suggestion would be to implement such microlab exercises early in the group process or as part of the pregroup training to increase comfortable with the exchange and use of corrective feedback (Wahesh et al., 2017). Group members may gain insight into how others feel and think when it comes to giving or receiving corrective feedback. Also, the format of the Corrective Feedback Microlab may be applied to other focus areas and used in other settings since the giving and receiving of corrective feedback extends beyond the therapeutic group setting.

Conclusion

The Corrective Feedback Microlab provides an avenue for group work professionals, students, and educators to explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with giving and receiving corrective feedback. The Corrective Feedback Microlab incorporates support from the literature in the application of cognitive-behavioral interventions to increase the probability of giving and receiving feedback (Robison & Hardt, 1992), comfort level with giving and receiving corrective feedback (Morran et al., 1998), as well as being more open to the acceptance and application of corrective feedback. Counselor educators and counselors who work with therapeutic and/or task groups are encouraged to explore other activities and training/facilitation tools to help increase the giving and receiving of corrective feedback.

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Appendix A

The Corrective Feedback Microlab:

Learning About Giving and Receiving Corrective Feedback

Purpose: The following questions are designed to help you reflect on your feelings and thoughts on the topic of giving and receiving corrective feedback and learn your fellow group members' feelings and thoughts about this topic.

Use the following definition in your reflection and discussion: *Corrective feedback is intended to encourage thoughtful self-examination or to express the feedback giver's perception of the need for change on the part of the receiver.*

For Example:

(a) I hear you complaining about the grade you received on your exam. However, you only come to 1 out of 3 classes a week.

(b) Before class you mentioned that you were going to put 110% effort into your classes, and then I noticed you drawing during the lecture. I'm confused by your actions. Please explain what that means.

1. When someone says to you, "I'd like to give you some feedback:"
 - (a) What do you think?
 - (b) What do you feel?
 - (c) What do you do?
 - (d) What is your greatest concern?

Share your responses giving specific examples.

2. When you think of giving someone corrective feedback:
 - (a) What do you think?
 - (b) What do you feel?
 - (c) What do you do?
 - (d) What is your greatest concern?

Share your responses giving specific examples.

3. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "receiving feedback as a child meant for me..." and then discuss your childhood memories with others.

Share your responses giving specific examples.

4. What do you think would help you give and receive corrective feedback easier?

Share your responses giving specific examples.

5. Reflect on your reactions to the microlab, what you learned today, and what you will take with you.

Share your responses giving specific examples.