GLOBAL EDITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO GROUP WORK PRACTICE

9E

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CSWE EPAS 2015 Core Competencies and Behaviors in This Text

Competency	Chapter
Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior	
Behaviors	
Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context.	1, 7, 13, 14
Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations	1, 4, 5
Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication	1, 6, 7
Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes	1, 6, 14
Use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior	1, 4
Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice	
Behaviors	
Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels	3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences	1, 5, 8, 14
Apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies	1, 4, 5, 7, 8
Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice	
Behaviors	
Apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels	4, 5, 8, 9
Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice	3, 4, 5, 9
Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice	
Behaviors	
Use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research	2, 3, 8, 14
Apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings	2, 4, 8, 10, 14
Use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice	
Behaviors	
Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services	1, 4, 5, 11, 12

CASE EXAMPLE

Reflecting Diversity and Handling Cross-Cultural Work

In a particular region in the Eastern Cape, most of the clients for a private counseling firm are Black Africans, mainly Xhosa, but a majority of the counselors are Asians and Indians. The partners of the firm have been debating as to whether there should be racial matching between a client and their counselor. The partners want to know their clients' opinions on the issue and have so far been relying on qualitative accounts and preferences without undertaking a more systematic and scientific approach to the alleged problem. Some of the younger counselors feel that the older counselors do not understand some aspects of the culture and communities of their clients. To build a good therapeutic relationship, the young counselors feel that speaking to a member of a different culture or race can impede the process. There are conscious and unconscious meanings and assumptions, including religious, cultural, and political beliefs to consider. Some of the partners believe that cross-cultural training, personal development, and a degree of supervision could be the answer. Language barriers have been overcome with the use of interpreters, suggesting the presence of a third party is not a concern. The counselors need to examine their own prejudices and understanding of a range of different cultural groups to become less distanced from the clients. Familiarity with the sociocultural context of their clients would be highly advantageous in the firm's cross-cultural services.

The leader can also gain knowledge about a particular cultural community through the process of *social mapping*, in which formal and informal relationships among members of a community are systematically observed and analyzed. For example, a leader assigned to conduct an after-school group that included several Latina members visited the local parish priest serving the Hispanic community and interviewed several members of the parish to gain a better understanding of the needs of young people in the community. In addition, the leader attended several social functions sponsored by the church and met with parents and other community members who provided the worker with new insights into the needs of Latina and Latino youth.

Devore and Schlesinger's (1999) community profile provides a helpful tool to complete the social mapping of a community. Lum's (2004) "culturagram" can be used to individualize social mapping by diagramming group members' individual experiences, their access to community resources, and their support networks. Rothman (2008) points out that assessments are also more productive and beneficial when they are conducted using a strengths and needs perspective rather than a problems and deficits perspective. Within the context of understanding differences, it is important to keep in mind that culture does not only refer to skin color and race.

It is particularly important for leaders to demonstrate, verbally and nonverbally, that they are accepting and nonjudgmental about the values, lifestyles, beliefs, and behaviors that members express as the group progresses. Recognition and acknowledgment of the value of difference and diversity is a key ingredient in building trust and cohesion in the group as it progresses (Diller, 2015). By taking opportunities throughout the group experience to encourage members to share their self-identities, leaders express their interest in members and their desire to get to know them individually. An example of how a group worker in South Africa can show a willingness to gain knowledge and understanding of the group that he or she will facilitate, is to show interest in the culture and the

food they are eating. If the leader is not allergic to the food, it is suggested that he or she tries the food of the group. The leader can show interest in the people's language and culture, for example, if they have a specific way of dressing and an attire, the leader can arrange to borrow one and wear it to the group session. This will in turn make the leader an acceptable person in the group.

Similarly, it is also important to continually acknowledge the effect of societal attitudes on members as the group progresses and they become more open about sharing experiences of marginalization and oppression. Leaders should keep in mind that members of minority groups continually experience prejudice, stereotyping, and overt and institutional **discrimination**. The reality of ethnic and racial superiority themes in society, as well as classism, sexism, and the history of depriving certain groups of rights and resources, should all be considered when attempting to develop greater cultural sensitivity. The following case example illustrates how one worker attempted to help a group discuss discrimination and develop a positive perspective on diversity.

CASE EXAMPLE

Discrimination and Diversity

During an educational group for parents of children with developmental disabilities, the worker asked members to discuss the effects on themselves and their children of societal attitudes toward children with disabilities. Members were very willing to discuss examples of prejudice and incidents of discrimination. The worker used these discussions to help members share experiences about other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation. These discussions helped members understand the universality of these experiences in the group and the dynamics behind prejudice and discrimination. The worker helped the group examine the strengths in their backgrounds and how negative experiences had helped them to grow strong and cope more effectively. The discussion also helped to empower members who began to talk about how they could best confront stereotypes and challenge discriminatory practices when they encountered them outside of the group.

Williams (1994) suggests that leaders themselves may go through stages of ethnocultural development in which they experience cultural resistance and "color blindness" before acknowledging the importance of **cultural influences** and achieving cultural sensitivity. Attending workshops on cultural sensitivity, doing self-inventories, researching one's own cultural heritage, attending specific cultural activities in the community, and joining cultural associations and organizations can help group workers gain greater cultural self-awareness and a better sense of their strengths and weaknesses when working with diverse members. McGrath and Axelson (1999), Prinsloo (2012), and Hogan-Garcia (2013) also present helpful exercises that can be used to increase leaders' awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity when working with multicultural groups.

Assessing Cultural Influences on Group Behavior

Assessing cultural influences on group behavior requires constant vigilance throughout the life of a group. Diversity among members from differing cultural backgrounds as well as among members from the same cultural background requires careful consideration.

IN PRACTICE

Diversity and Difference in Practice

Behavior: Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels

Critical Thinking Question: Group workers are advised to consider the cultural influences on members' behaviors. How do workers use this information during the planning stage of the group?

Some issues that should be considered when assessing cultural influences on group behavior are described below.

Factors to Consider When Assessing Cultural Influences on Group Behavior

- The match between member and leader backgrounds
- The influence of member backgrounds on group participation
- Members' views of the agency sponsoring the group
- The cultural sensitivity of outreach and recruiting efforts
- The formation of relationships among persons from diverse backgrounds
- The influence of the larger environmental context where members live on their behavior in the group
- Preferred patterns of behavior, values, and languages within the group
- Members' experiences with oppression and their feelings about themselves, their group identity, and the larger society
- Members' acculturation and the way they have fit into the society through work and school

Early in the planning stage of a group, the benefits of matching member and leader backgrounds should be considered. There is some evidence that minority clients express a preference for ethnically similar workers (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995; D'Andrea, 2004), but there is mixed evidence about whether matching client and worker backgrounds actually leads to more effective treatment (Hays, 2007; Yuki & Brewer, 2014). Also, there are often practical difficulties with matching workers and members in real-world settings (Forsyth, 2014; Yuki & Brewer, 2014). Group workers who are different from their group members can lead the group. In a country like South Africa, with its history of segregation through apartheid, the question arises if a white group leader can lead a group with Black group members and if a Black group leader can lead a group of white group members. The answer to this question is that it is surely possible if the group leader shows an eagerness to learn about the unique identities of the group members in their different cultural contexts. Showing interest in the customs, traditions, and cultural practices bridge the divides.

Regardless of whether matching is attempted, some differences in the backgrounds of members and between members and the leader are likely. Therefore, when one plans a group, it is important for the leader to consider how members' backgrounds are likely to affect their participation in it. For example, it is helpful to assess how potential members' differing cultural backgrounds and levels of acculturation and assimilation affect their

understanding of the purpose of the group. Members with different backgrounds bring differing expectations and experiences, and that can affect how they view the group's purposes and the way work is conducted in the group. Confusion about the purpose of the group can lead to members' frustration and anxiety in the group's early stages. Similarly, the level of written materials to achieve educational objectives or when engaging in program activities should be carefully assessed not only for members who speak English as a second or third language, but also when working with those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds who may have dropped out of school for economic or other reasons. An assessment of the literacy levels of group members is crucial.

The leader should also consider how members' backgrounds are likely to interact with the sponsorship of the group. The worker should consider, for example, how the sponsoring agency is viewed by members from different backgrounds. It is also important to consider how accessible the agency is, both physically and psychologically, to potential members. As Davis, Galinsky, and Schopler (1995) note, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries of neighborhoods may be difficult for members to cross. When the sponsoring agency is perceived as being in a neighborhood that does not welcome persons from differing cultures, the leader may need to hold meetings in welcoming communities. Key community members, such as clergy, political leaders, and neighborhood elders, may play an important part in helping the worker to gain support for the group and to reach potential members.

When composing a diverse group, the worker should consider how members from differing cultural groups are likely to relate to each other. A marked imbalance among members with one type of characteristic can cause problems of subgrouping, isolation, or domination by members of one particular background (Burnes & Ross, 2010). For example, Pure (2012) has noted that same-sex groups have advantages when the group task is associated with issues of personal identity, social oppression, empowerment, and issues of personal and political change. In the African context, sensitive topics such as sexuality, fertility, and reproduction are difficult to facilitate in mixed gender groups. Women may not be so open to talk to a male group leader than they would be with a female group leader.

IN PRACTICE

Assessment

Behavior: Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies

Critical Thinking Question: Members are influenced by the environments where they live. How can group workers gain an appreciation and understanding of these environments?

A complete assessment of group members should consider the larger environmental context in which members live and how that context might influence behavior within the group (Ramos, Jones, & Toseland, 2005; Ratts, Anthony, & Santos, 2010; Rothman, 2008). The direct experience of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression can have profound effects on members' behavior, but social impact theory suggests that minorities

cluster together in groups, thereby uplifting and empowering themselves in the face of a dominant culture (Forsyth, 2014). The following case example describes the impact of one type of experience on open communication and self-disclosure among a group of resettled refugees from Myanmar.

CASE EXAMPLE

Communication and Self-Disclosure

Despite his efforts to model the skills of open communication and self-disclosure, the leader of a group for resettled refugees from Myanmar often encountered members who were silent when discussions turned to conditions in their homeland. During these discussions, several members had difficulty talking about their experiences and seemed unable to confide in other members of the group. Through encouragement and honest interest, the worker helped several quiet members identify that they had been exposed to a variety of extreme conditions in their homeland, including torture, civil unrest, and government-sponsored violence. One member bravely told her story of watching members of a different ethnic and religious group kill her parents. Her courage in disclosing this to the group helped other silent members to develop trust in the group and to gradually share their own stories. The worker learned how external oppression can profoundly influence communication and interaction within a group.

When problems such as member dissatisfaction or conflict among members occur, the leader should keep in mind that the problems may be caused by cultural differences, not by an individual member's characteristics or flaws in group processes. For example, some members of a group became upset when two group members who experienced severe oppression and discrimination became animated when talking about oppression. The other members talked about their reactions to the anger expressed by these two members. The worker helped the group discuss what it was like to live with racism and prejudice on a daily basis and the anger that this causes. She acknowledged the white members' difficulty in knowing how to react when this anger is expressed. The worker also helped the group to see that, in some ways, the group reflected difficult and unresolved issues in the community. The interaction that followed the worker's intervention helped all members to become more empathic and understanding almost immediately, and it gradually increased group cohesion.

Several factors can interfere with the process of learning about how cultural background affects members' behavior in the group. The leader may fail to recognize that

IN PRACTICE

Diversity and Difference in Practice

Behavior: Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels

Critical Thinking Question: Group work involves work with people from many cultural backgrounds. How do cultural factors influence group dynamics?

cultural differences exist or may diminish their importance. Facing difference is a difficult process. Leaders may think recognizing and expressing difference among members will cause conflict within the group. The leader may also fail to recognize differences among members of the same cultural group by assuming that all members of that culture have common behavioral characteristics and thereby overgeneralize and stereotype members with a common cultural heritage. Even if members share a common cultural background, major differences in acculturation, economic status, and other factors influence members' group experiences (Lum, 2011; Ratts & Pedersen, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2013). Information on how members' cultural backgrounds can influence group dynamics follows.

Cultural Influences on Group Dynamics

Communication and Interaction

- Language, symbols, and nonverbal communication patterns of persons from different cultural backgrounds, for example not making eye contact as a sign of respect for someone older
- Language sensitivity and knowledge of words appropriate to various cultural contexts
- Stylistic elements of communication among diverse groups
- Nonverbal communications and how cultural groups differ in their use of space and distance
- Interaction patterns specific to different cultural groups

Cohesion

- Subgroup patterns among various cultural groups
- Expectations and motivations among persons from diverse backgrounds
- Cultural characteristics that influence common group goals
- Level of openness and intimacy that is comfortable for various cultural groups, for example African women who do not speak out in the presence of males

Social Integration

- Culturally determined normative behavior, for example that group members, out of respect, might say what they think the group leader wants to hear
- Influence of culture on task and socio-emotional role development in groups
- Influence of discrimination and oppression on how members experience norms, roles, status, and power within groups

Group Culture

- Shared ideas, beliefs, and values about the dominant culture held by members from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Level of group feeling expressed by members as influenced by cultural norms that are a part of their identity
- World views about the value of material wealth and spiritual practices by members from diverse cultures. An example of South African spiritual practices is that a group member may first want to consult the ancestors before making a decision that will influence the family

The leader should assess how members' backgrounds are likely to affect the way they experience communication and interaction patterns, cohesion, social integration, and the overall group culture. To assess communication and interaction patterns, it is important for the leader to understand the language, symbols, and nonverbal communication