

Data analysis between standard psychoeducational and therapeutic-education group work programs

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This paper explores a new blend in group work called the therapeutic-educational group. Therapeutic-educational groups (the focus of this paper) provide an opportunity for the participants to learn and practice relationship skills immediately within the environment of the group. Boud and Walker's (1993) model of reflection is used to inform facilitators about the process of learning in the moment. This learning can then be applied to wider life experiences. Participants have an opportunity to enter into experiential learning; build on their strengths, and address some of multiple problems in their life that prohibit the use of the new skills. This paper also reports on group work data collected by the UnitingCare Burnside Western Sydney Family Worker Program from February 2002 and June 2006.

The current focus of psychoeducational groups

Recently, psychoeducational groups have become widespread in health and welfare settings. These groups are more structured than discussion based groups and have a clearly defined set of educational teaching tools and objectives. Psychoeducational groups have flourished across the welfare and health sectors, including in correctional centres, community health, mental health, children and young people and parenting settings because the outcomes have been so positive. They are more easily evaluated, predominately focused on cognitive and behavioural issues rather than interpersonal relationship issues.

The Association for Specialists in Group Work (2000) developed a categorisation system to improve basic training standards. These specialisations are:

1. Task/Work Groups - Involves organisational and task focused settings for group and teamwork
2. Psychoeducational Groups - Structured educational group programs that help participants develop knowledge and skills for coping with immediate or potential problems, developmental transitions, or life crises
3. Counselling Groups - Less structured group work/counselling focused on dealing with normal human issues experienced by most people at some stage in life. It is focused on immediate personal issues and can be personal growth group orientated
4. Psychotherapy Groups - Less structured group work/counselling that focuses on individual experiences where participants have not had their emotional needs met during childhood and have developed some psychopathology

Therapeutic-educational groups are a formal blend of a counselling or emotional support group format followed by a break and then a short psychoeducational group.

The new development of therapeutic-education groups

Therapeutic-education groups combine a 1½-hour therapeutic group session, followed by a short break, and then a 1-hour psychoeducational session. The

combination of these formats allows the participants to be exposed to the structured development of new skills/ knowledge about relationships/parenting, but also provides the opportunity to address the personal issues that surround the application of these ideas. The group is held for one 3-hour session per week, concluding at the end of a 9-week block. There is a break during the school holiday period before another block commences at the beginning of the next school term. This allows participants to attend the group for several blocks, as long as they have identified an appropriate reason to be in the group. Other participants may terminate their involvement at the end of one block as their purpose has been fulfilled.

The therapeutic group allows time to focus on the current issues participant's face within their life. For this to happen the learning needs to move from 'retrospective learning' to 'learning within the moment'. Tom knew it was hard for him to communicate honestly with women. He had regularly discussed these issues in regard to his previous partners. The ability to use a real group experience to explore this issue allowed the Tom's reflection to move from the past (hypothetical) to occurring in real time. However, it is difficult for facilitators to operate at this level, as 'learning in the moment' requires them to have confidence in working in the unstructured/ unknown.

Incidental evaluation comparison of therapeutic-educational group data

This also reports on group work data collected by the UnitingCare Burnside Western Sydney Family Worker Program from February 2002 and June 2006. This data was analysed by an external assessor using participant data collection forms and end of group evaluation forms involving 1379 participants who attended 117 groups

The feedback from all these groups was averaged and then compared to a sub-set of data for the therapeutic-educational groups. There are limitations to this analysis as it only uses end of group evaluation results, involves only psychoeducational groups conducted within one agency and was not formally set up to assess the above differences. Also the therapeutic-educational groups were solely conducted with fathers (130 men across 16 groups that were provided in two disadvantaged areas of Sydney). However it does provide initial results that explore possible differences between psychoeducational and therapeutic-educational groups.

Participant differences (Tung, 2007)

		Psychoeducational groups	Therapeutic-educational group	Difference
Description of participants	No. of females	71%	0%	-71%
	No. of males	26%	100%	76%
	No of 2 parent families	44%	38%	-6%
	No of single parents	25%	29%	4%
	No. of step families	19%	25%	6%
	Grandparent/ guardian	2%	2%	0%
	Separated Parent	8%	15%	7%
	Other	3%	5%	2%
	under 15 years old	0%	0%	0%
Age of service user	15-24years	10%	6%	-4%
	25-34 years	43%	62%	19%
	35-44years	36%	20%	-16%
	45+ years	11%	12%	1%

Age of any children (If Relevant)	0-4 years	39%	36%	-3%
	5-10 years	33%	37%	4%
	11-15 years	19%	17%	-2%
	16-18 years	6%	6%	0%
	19+ years	4%	4%	0%
Language spoken at home	No. speaking other Languages	24%	8%	-16%

In summary, 26% of the psychoeducational group participants were men. This is a significant outcome in itself as most groups were facilitated in the daytime. The therapeutic-educational groups were all facilitated in the evenings and had a higher proportion of younger men or separated fathers. The decrease of English as a second language in the therapeutic-educational groups is explained through their location being primarily in lower socio-economic Anglo-Saxon communities in Western Sydney.

Accessibility of groups (Tung, 2007)

		Psychoeducational groups	Therapeutic-educational group	Difference
Access & Locality	Booking into group (not easy)	2%	0%	-2%
	Booking into group (okay)	29%	18%	-11%
	Booking into group (very easy)	68%	78%	10%
	The venue not easy	3%	2%	-1%
	The venue (okay)	31%	16%	-15%
	The venue very easy	66%	80%	14%
Aboriginality	No. who are Aboriginal?	5%	13%	8%
Centrelink Payments	No. on Centrelink payment?	56%	68%	12%
Reason attending group	Friend recommended	Incomplete data	3%	3%
	Professional recommendation	Incomplete data	2%	2%
	Improve child's self esteem	50%	70%	20%
	Future challenges	61%	59%	-2%
	Increase my confidence	65%	84%	19%
	Other ways to discipline	60%	72%	12%
	Difficulties I am experiencing	53%	76%	23%
	Learn normal expect	49%	52%	3%
	Learn to manage strong emotions	43%	72%	29%
Heard about group?	Partner/friend/relative	23%	52%	29%
	School counsellor/welfare worker	7%	14%	7%
	Counsellor	14%	11%	-3%
	School Newsletter	9%	1%	-8%
	Local Paper	3%	2%	-1%
	Doctor or Medical Centre	2%	2%	0%
	Local Neighbourhood ctr	7%	3%	-4%
	DOCS Helpline or Caseworker	9%	12%	3%
	Department of Housing	1%	2%	1%
	Centrelink	2%	0%	-2%
	Parent Helpline	1%	4%	3%

Family Support Service/Centre	17%	0%	-17%
Other Burnside service	11%	8%	-3%

In summary, the venues for therapeutic-educational groups expected to be easier to access as they are based in the local areas where the men live. The higher level of Aboriginal attendance is explained by the therapeutic-educational groups being based in the strong indigenous community of Mt Druit.

Attendance patterns (Tung, 2007)

		Psychoeducational groups	Therapeutic-educational group	Difference
Attendance at each sessions	Session 1	87%	79%	-8%
	Session 2	84%	75%	-9%
	Session 3	75%	82%	7%
	Session 4	71%	78%	7%
	Session 5	70%	75%	5%
	Session 6		82%	
	Session 7		72%	
	Session 8		75%	
	Session 9		73%	
	Session 10			
	% attend 50% or more of gp.	81%	85%	4%
	% attend 80% or more of gp.	63%	77%	14%

In summary, attendance patterns are similar with psychoeducational groups having a length of 4-5 weeks. Therapeutic-educational groups were for duration of 9 weeks using a 3 hour session with a ½ hour break in the middle. The commencement of therapeutic-educational groups is always slower with many members only commencing by week 2 or 3. The overall attendance to the group (regardless of length) was slightly higher with 14% more people attending at least 80% of the program.

Feedback outcomes (Tung, 2007)

		Psychoeducational groups	Therapeutic-educational group	Difference
Evaluation Sheets	No complete Evaluate.	72%	82%	10%
Feedback Ratings	Two ideas grasped	83%	95%	12%
	Benefit from attending	89%	99%	10%
Feedback Statement	1. Worker respectful	83%	93%	10%
	2. Worker listened	80%	91%	11%
	3. Service worthwhile	83%	93%	10%
	4. Covered what I expected	80%	86%	6%
	5. I understood all material	79%	91%	12%
	6. I am better at communicating	70%	89%	19%
	7. I am more positive about family relationships	75%	88%	13%
	8. I feel more confident in my parenting	78%	89%	11%
	9. Learnt at least 2 new ways	86%	88%	2%
Using two or more new strategies	Yes	31%	22%	-9%
	No	2%	0%	-2%

Knowledge & Skills Change	Knowledge & skills (average)	59%	66%	7%
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Feedback outcomes 2 (Tung, 2007)

Number of Sessions	Number of sessions (not enough)	20%	5%	-15%
	Number of sessions (just right)	69%	86%	17%
	Number of sessions (too many)	2%	8%	6%
Post - Suitability of Venue	Suitability of venue (not suitable)	1%	1%	0%
	Suitability of venue (okay)	34%	24%	-10%
	Suitability of venue (very suitable)	55%	75%	20%
Handouts	Handouts used (not enough)	4%	9%	5%
	Handouts used (just right)	79%	85%	6%
	handouts used too many	3%	3%	0%
Usefulness of Handouts	Handouts used not useful	0%	1%	1%
	Handouts used somewhat useful	27%	41%	14%
	handouts used very useful	50%	37%	-13%
Would recommend to others?	Yes	72%	80%	8%
	No	0%	0%	0%
Situation	My situation (worse)	2%	0%	-2%
	My situation (the same)	12%	12%	0%
	My situation (better)	70%	88%	18%
Know of 2 more services/people	Yes	65%	83%	18%
	No	11%	14%	3%
Feedback Comments	Inspiring	48%	73%	25%
	Supportive	77%	90%	13%
	Informative	73%	88%	15%
	Confidence Building	61%	80%	19%
	Relevant to my family	52%	73%	21%
	enjoyable	73%	88%	15%
	Practical	63%	77%	14%
	Encouraging	72%	86%	14%
	Fun	66%	81%	15%
	Helpful	88%	86%	-2%
	Too much information	1%	4%	3%
	Useless	0%	0%	0%
	Not relevant	0%	0%	0%
	Too rushed	6%	8%	2%
	Boring	0%	0%	0%
	Slow	1%	1%	0%
	Frustrating	1%	2%	1%
Awkward	3%	4%	1%	

In summary, the above data highlight significant increases (above 10%) for most questions. The question 'Using two or more new strategies' had a lower rating for the therapeutic-educational groups' however this response relied on the participant writing down their response. Literacy is a key issue for the therapeutic-educational

group participants and this issue is also reflected in the question regarding the usefulness of the handouts.

While many participants said that the length of the psychoeducational groups was too short, many more participants were pleased in the length of the therapeutic-educational groups. The indicators for change in interactive group work require that the experience of the group is inspiring, supportive; informative, confidence building, relevant to my family, enjoyable, practical and encouraging. All these characteristics featured more strongly in the feedback from therapeutic-educational groups.

Key processes in therapeutic-education groups

The key processes in therapeutic-education groups are:

	Key factors to be addressed within therapeutic/ educational group work	Outcomes
Therapeutic group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of key issues arising during the week and how this connects with the experiences of other participants. • Participants to develop a clear purpose for being in the group. • Stronger ability to recognise and have empathy towards the personal issues that other people experience. • Development and recognition of interpersonal communication issues. • Recognition of how a participant's actions influence the other group members and those around them. • Recognition of the choice people make regarding their own friendship, family and other sub-groups. • Exploration of how one participant's experience is also relevant to other participants' life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalisation. • Reduction of isolation. • Recognition of life patterns. • Commitment to identifying, reviewing and finding solutions to own problems. • Development of empathy. • Separation of own and other people's issues. • New learning obtained from the group applied to rest of life.
Break period and outside group activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal discussion/ peer support connections strengthened. • One to one supports between participant/ participant and participant/ leader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new peer networks.
Psychoeducational Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured exercises exploring topic area, belief systems, actions and alternative responses. • Leader designed progression through learning material. • Focus on addressing issues identified by participants recognised at the beginning of the group. (Dayle Jones & Robinson, 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new knowledge or skills. • Better coping skills. • New responses to life crises, transition periods or developmental life stages.

Conclusion

There is an important role for therapeutic-educational group work, especially when participants have limited educational experience. This is supported by an incidental comparison of evaluation data.

The blend of these two styles of group work allow for structured learning to occur, accompanied by enough opportunity to focus on the immediate issues happening in a participant's life. Through addressing these issues in tandem, the group is likely to have a greater relevance to the participants.

Therapeutic groups enable participants to move from learning retrospectively to 'learning in the moment'. This involves moving from a 'waking sleep' to being 'fully awake' where participants are more aware of the role of noticing their and other people's current experiences and intervening through reflection in this process.

As the facilitator notices the secondary purposes that participants have when entering the group, they can ensure that the therapeutic group centres on these issues. As the issues will be displayed in the actions and behaviours of the participants in the group, the facilitator will have the opportunity to link this learning to the participant's wider life experience and to other people's life experience in the group. The participant will have an opportunity to act out an adequate solution to the difficult issue and investigate how this can be integrated into their wider life.

'Learning in the moment' is difficult but easy to achieve. It is intense but also playful and light. Mastering the use of these paradoxes allows a facilitator to move easily between 'retrospective learning' and 'learning in the moment'. As a participant, the experience of this learning process is demanding but delightful, and they would never wish to miss the opportunity to be involved.

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