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This article explores a model partnership with a counseling education program and the Peace Corps. Counselor education students in a group counseling course developed and implemented a singular structured group session with clients not typically used (e.g., non-counseling students) to maximize student learning and implement group counseling skills. Group services were provided to returning Peace Corps volunteers with diverse cultural experiences who were in career and life transitions. In addition, the authors provide strategies for developing similar partnerships between counselor education programs and other agencies.

Keywords: group counseling, counselor education, Peace Corps, volunteers, student learning

Group counseling is a core element of accredited master's-level counselor education programs, as noted in the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs Training Standards (CACREP, 2009). During the group counseling course, students often learn the process of participating in and leading experiential process groups, typically with other counseling students (McDonnell, Toth, & Aldarondo, 2005). While process groups are beneficial to student learning, student learning could be maximized by going one step further and providing group counseling to non-counseling students. The authors propose that rather than waiting until students' clinical coursework (e.g., practicum, internship) to provide counseling services to non-counseling students, participating in a model partnership with the Peace Corps could foster such student learning. This experience offers master's-level group counseling students the opportunity to provide group counseling to non-counseling students under intense supervision. In addition, students provide a service to Returning Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), who traditionally face a myriad of challenges transitioning back into the United States from their international service (Bosustow, 2006; Callahan & Hess, 2012; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gaw, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010).

The first section of this article summarizes the importance of student learning through experiential group counseling, especially with non-counseling students. Additionally, the authors discuss RPCVs and their potential needs following deployment. The second section of this article describes the partnership between a counselor education program and the Peace Corps that has evolved over several years to include group counseling services to RPCVs. The logistical aspects involved (e.g., class assignments) are offered as a model for future adaptation, as well as overall trends in group members' and facilitators' feedback. Finally, the authors provide suggestions for counselor education programs to implement similar partnerships with their local organizations and other programs on campus.

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Background of Partnership

The partnership between a counselor education program and the Peace Corps developed with consideration of the needs of counselor education students and RPCVs. The authors discuss training standards and ethical considerations in relation to teaching group counseling through the use of experiential groups. Non-peer group members—in this case RPCVs—are described in both their unique diverse experiences and the challenges they face that are suitable for group exploration. Group counseling students and RPCVs are explored through their unique needs from and contributions to the partnership.

Group Counseling Students

Experiential process groups have been used in counselor education programs to help students learn basic group counseling skills and learn about themselves (Anderson & Price, 2001; Lennie, 2007; McDonnell et al., 2005; Osborn, Daninhirsch, & Page, 2003). Group counseling courses should teach students skill sets in group leadership, and also provide students with experiential opportunities to practice the skills they acquire (Furr & Barret, 2000). By incorporating experiential opportunities into a group counseling course, instructors increase student knowledge and understanding of group dynamics, group leadership skills, and group concepts (Akos, Goodnough, & Milsom, 2004).

Both the Association for Specialist in Group Work (ASGW, 2000) and CACREP (2009) recommend that students train in group counseling through participation in experiential learning, such as group leadership and membership roles. Additionally, Shumaker, Ortiz, and Brenninkmeyer (2011) outlined the consensus between counselor educators and accrediting bodies that experiential group participation provides students with greater levels of group process and self-awareness compared to solely didactic instruction. Thus, experiential learning such as group membership and leadership are paramount in training group counseling students.

While group membership can lead to increased "interpersonal learning, self-awareness, and empathy" (Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, & Young, 2009, p. 365) and provide an intrinsic understanding of group process, group counseling students need direct experiences to practice the concepts and skills learned in class (Gillam, 2004). Group leadership experience increases students' competence and ease in implementing interventions with immediacy (Toth & Stockton, 1996). Group leadership can occur on a rotating basis for group counseling students in their experiential group, yet there are ethical considerations (e.g., programmatic gatekeeping, multiple relationships) when students participate in group counseling with peers, including disclosing intimate details to fellow students and/or faculty members (Furr & Barret, 2000; Shumaker et al., 2011). The American Counseling Association's *Code of Ethics* (2005) describes the need to protect the rights of students when groups are led by peers. Thus, alternatives to traditional in-class experiential groups may be helpful to allow students to gain group leadership skills without feeling uncomfortable about personal disclosures or multiple relationships.

Given the limitations and concerns described above, counselor education students who provide group counseling to non-peers may bypass some of the disadvantages of experiential groups with peers (Conyne, Wilson, & Ward, 1997). By recruiting group members from outside of class, ethical dilemmas surrounding multiple relationships amongst peers as well as with students and instructors are negated, and the instructor can focus on evaluating the group leadership skills demonstrated in the session, rather than student self-disclosures (Furr & Barret, 2000). As a result, students leading a group of non-peers may be better able to implement their newly acquired group counseling skills. Additionally, students leading a group of non-peers may gain exposure to a different population and practice serving diverse client needs.

Returning Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs)

Both the CACREP (2009) standards and ACA's *Code of Ethics* (2005) emphasize the need for counselors to advocate for and serve diverse populations. The CACREP standards state that counselors should be prepared

for "promoting cultural social justice, advocacy…and other culturally supported behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body" (p. 11). Not only should counselors be prepared to work with culturally diverse clients, but they also are charged with advocating and serving diverse clients and supporting their wellness. RPCVs are a diverse population in terms of their acculturation levels and varied service-related cultural identities. They are a population that typically encounters difficulties transitioning back into the United States post-international service, including possible social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and career difficulties (Bosustow, 2006; Callahan & Hess, 2012; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gaw, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010). As a result, RPCVs are a population with unique needs that could benefit from counseling services.

During their service, Peace Corps volunteers spend 2–3 years in a host culture with typically only one visit back to the United States (Callahan & Hess, 2012). Additionally, Peace Corps volunteers are encouraged to become fully immersed in their host culture and complete 3 months of intensive cultural and linguistic training in preparation (Callahan & Hess, 2012). When abroad, expatriates (e.g., Peace Corps volunteers) go through an adaptation or acculturation process. Haslberger (2005) described cross-cultural adaptation as "a complex process in which a person becomes capable of functioning effectively in a culture other than the one he or she was originally socialized in" (p. 86). According to Berry (2005), "acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698).

Osland (2000) described the expatriate experience as trifold: (a) separation from the home culture: adventurous and homesick; (b) immersion into the host culture: a transformative struggle to acclimate and enjoy living in the host culture; and (c) return and reintegration into the home culture: often the most challenging stage, as individuals attempt to integrate their new identity into previous roles and relationships. Expatriates' acculturation in the host culture can be a transformative process of negotiating and letting go of aspects of their home culture and previous identity in exchange for a new cultural identity and norms (Osland, 2000). In a qualitative study, Kohonen (2004) discovered that expatriates encountered identity shifts when living abroad, including developing bicultural identities. Haslberger (2005) echoed similar sentiments, stating that full immersion in a foreign culture impacts the individuals in every aspect of their identity. In a recent study, Callahan and Hess (2012) found that RPCVs reported being more multicultural and developing new ways of thinking, as a result of their time in the host culture. In fact, RPCVs often recounted continuing to practice cultural patterns learned abroad, even after returning to the United States (Callahan & Hess, 2012).

RPCVs are a population with varied needs. One of the challenges facing RPCVs, along with other expatriates who return to their home culture after living abroad for an extended period, is reverse culture shock. "Reverse culture shock is the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time" (Gaw, 2000, pp. 83–84). Reverse culture shock includes (a) feelings of surprise and frustration at the reentry process, when reentry is more challenging than anticipated; (b) feeling disconnected from both home and abroad cultures; and (c) depression, loneliness, anxiety, isolation, and social maladjustment reported by expatriates (Bosustow, 2006; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gaw, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010).

Returning to the home culture can be as stressful as becoming integrated into the host culture, and often more so, as RPCVs do not expect the return home to be so challenging (Callahan & Hess, 2012). Reverse culture shock can occur because not only have the RPCVs changed, so have their home cultures in their absence (Callahan & Hess, 2012). Bosustow (2006) found that RPCVs reported their reentry adjustment taking longer than they initially expected—often a year or longer. Additionally, approximately 25% of the RPCVs in Bosustow's study stated that the Peace Corps did not adequately address their psychological reentry needs. However,

over 77% of these RPCVs reported that the most helpful component of their reentry was talking to other RP-CVs about their experiences.

RPCVs have many adjustment needs as they reenter the United States and report a lack of adequate formal support (Bosustow, 2006). Best practices recommend that counselors receive training to meet the diverse and unmet needs of clients such as the RPCVs (ACA, 2005; CACREP, 2009). Additionally, since the RPCVs in Bosustow's (2006) study found informal support from their peers with shared experiences, group counseling with other RPCVs could be a particularly beneficial counseling intervention for this population. Assisting RPCVs with challenges related to reentry (e.g., career transition, interpersonal concerns) allows counselor education students to provide a needed service while gaining counseling experience with a diverse, non-student population.

The Partnership in Action

The authors have taught a general group counseling class to both school and clinical mental health counseling students. In the first author's initial years of teaching group counseling, students reported many advantages and disadvantages of utilizing peers with the experiential group as outlined above. Through conversations with students, it became apparent that a different experiential group counseling experience would enhance students' integration of material presented in the group counseling course. As a result, the first author developed a culminating assignment for the course.

The purpose of the culminating assignment was to integrate student learning from didactic lectures, group counseling observations in the classroom and in the community, group membership, and group leadership with peers. The culminating assignment offered a direct experience with non-peer clients under intense supervision, creating a safe environment for students to experiment with newly obtained group counseling skills. In this instance, students had the opportunity to increase confidence in conducting groups prior to their clinical practicum or internship. This partnership has evolved over the last several years with the process expanding to include doctoral students in both the supervision and instruction process as part of the doctoral students' supervision and teaching internships. This article will explain the process of designing, implementing, and supervising the RPCVs groups, including (a) describing the class assignment, (b) group member procurement, and (c) group composition and format.

Class Assignments

Furr and Barret (2000) suggested that structured psychoeducational groups can be implemented as a component of an entry-level group counseling course, providing students with the valuable skills of designing and leading groups. Structured psychoeducational groups can be found in a variety of counseling specialties (Gladding, 2012), such as clinical mental health, marriage and family, career, school, college and addictions. In fact, these structured groups are the primary group type utilized by school counselors (Akos et al., 2004). Psychoeducational groups should be customized for different populations (e.g., youth versus adults) (DeLucia-Waack, 2006; Gladding, 2012). Yet there are many similarities between the overall group counseling process for both youth and adult clients, including membership screening and selection, confidentiality issues, group leadership skills, and the value of group work (Gladding, 2012; Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2007; Van Velsor, 2004). Counseling students are being prepared to work in a multitude of settings with varied client needs (e.g., schools, clinical mental health agencies, colleges). As such, learning fundamental structured psychoeducational group skills is useful for counseling students across specialties, settings and client needs (Conyne et al., 1997).

Leading up to the culminating assignment of designing and conducting a structured psychoeducational group, students completed a number of class assignments in preparation: (1) students became familiar with group concepts by reading their text, listening to lectures, and partaking in class discussions; (2) they observed

videotaped demonstrations in class and two group counseling sessions in the community or school settings; (3) they participated in an experiential group with their peers; and (4) they facilitated or co-facilitated the experiential group with classmates on a rotating basis at least once. These assignments were processed in writing as well as verbally with classmates.

ASGW (2000) indicated that competencies need to be gained in planning, implementing, leading and evaluating group interventions. These competencies converged in the culminating assignment divided into two parts: the development of a group counseling proposal and the actual implementation of the proposed psychoeducational group for RPCVs (see Appendix for sample assignment descriptions). By both designing and implementing the group within the course, students immediately applied psychoeducational group proposals they created. By developing their own psychoeducational group, students had high personal investment in both the proposal and its implementation.

For the culminating assignment, students were encouraged to work in pairs; thus, the co-facilitators co-authored the group proposal. The group proposal was due a few weeks prior to the students conducting the structured psychoeducational group, giving the instructor time to coordinate logistics with the RPCV coordinator. The instructor graded the proposals, emphasizing mastery of the assignment with revisions being a part of the process. Svinicki and McKeachie (2014) describe how student anxiety about grades can be lessened by allowing students to resubmit revised work. The instructor could then focus on student anxiety related to student facilitation of the group. In addition, these revised group proposals can be a document added to students' professional portfolios.

Intensive supervision was provided as the instructor and/or doctoral supervision interns were present for all group sessions. Stockton and Toth (1996) suggested that providing a supervised experiential group experience is a vital element in training group leaders. In addition, Toth and Stockton (1996) stated that observing other students lead a group can be instrumental in attaining group leadership skills. These two factors were combined by providing on-site supervision and reviewing portions of students' recorded group sessions during the following class session. Also, on-site supervision allowed the instructor to address any client safety concerns that arose (e.g., harm to self or others).

One of the biggest challenges to implementing this learning opportunity was scheduling the groups at a time when supervisors, students and group members were available. Over the past several years, the authors tried a number of configurations for scheduling the psychoeducational groups. Holding multiple sessions concurrently over 3–4 hours was the preferred method.

Osborn et al. (2003) recommended that counseling students engage in instructor-facilitated reflection to debrief and learn from their group leadership experience. Likewise, Luke and Kiweewa (2010) recommended that counselor education programs include reflective journaling to maximize students' self-awareness in the group work context. After completion of the culminating assignment (the psychoeducational group facilitation), students submitted a reflection paper describing their reaction to their group leadership experience. Student learning continued through receiving and discussing post-session evaluations of RPCVs. Following the group facilitation, students reported having a clearer sense of their strength and growth areas. During students' subsequent practicum and internship courses, they often reported confidence and skill in group counseling, which they attributed to the culminating assignment in their group counseling course.

Group Member Procurement
The described counselor education program had an established relationship with the local Peace Corps Career Center (PCCC), which was established years prior through a faculty member offering career counseling services to RPCVs. For example, practicum students provided individual counseling sessions to RPCVs

during the spring semester. Peace Corps staff expressed an interest in offering year-round services to RPCVs, due to the limited debriefing available to RPCVs (J. Hammer and R. Michon, personal communication, January 8, 2008). As a result, group counseling sessions were a welcome addition during the fall semester. The PCCC coordinator was instrumental in recruiting and screening group members. After counseling students provided a paragraph describing their proposed groups, the coordinator marketed the groups through a RPCV listserv, and flyers were posted throughout the PCCC inviting RPCVs to participate in group sessions. Group members, RP-CVs, chose topic area(s) that were appropriate for their personal career and life-transition challenges; there were no fees for group members to attend the sessions. RPCVs were notified in advance that the psychoeducational group would be recorded for instructional purposes, and both informed consent and authorization of recording were secured in writing at the beginning of the group sessions. Students began their group sessions by briefly describing the limits of confidentiality.

Group Composition and Format

The group size was predetermined by the instructor(s), and the coordinator at the PCCC screened and en-rolled people accordingly. The preference was to have co-facilitators with no more than 10 RPCVs in each group, with a smaller group number for those groups with only one facilitator (in the instance there was an odd number of students enrolled in the group counseling course). The RPCVs varied in age from mid-twenties to mid-forties and in marital status, although the majority were single. The group members were from varied eth-nic and racial backgrounds (predominantly Caucasian). While most of the RPCVs lived near the PCCC where the structured psychoeducational groups were held, prior to their Peace Corps service they lived throughout the United States. The Peace Corps experience had occurred in a wide variety of geographic locations around the globe, where RPCVs had been immersed in another culture—often a culture in the developing world—for an extended period of time. Most of the RPCV group members had returned from their service within the past year, yet some of them had been stateside for up to 5 years.

The number of groups offered to the RPCVs during one semester depended on student enrollment in the group counseling class. Various RPCV group members chose to attend sessions on distinctly different topics and often participated in multiple groups offered by the group counseling students. The structured psychoedu-cational group topics were offered during late afternoon and evening hours to maximize the opportunity for RPCVs to attend a variety of sessions. Group counseling topics often included career decision-making (making career choices), networking cooperatives (building networking skills for a job search), life transitions (process-ing readjustment to life back in the United States), work-life balance (developing coping strategies to create manageable lifestyle), interviewing skills (preparing for the interview), and stress management during the job search (learning stress management techniques). The instructor(s) and the on-site PCCC coordinator orches-trated the flow of sessions, keeping group leaders and group members on schedule.

RPCV Feedback About the Groups

Students collected feedback from the RPCVs after each psychoeducational group to identify strengths and suggestions regarding the students as facilitators. Additional anecdotal feedback was solicited from the RPCVs about the overall process; RPCVs typically responded very favorably about the experience. Specifically, the positive highlights from the experience tended to be resources and information, universality and cohesiveness experienced by the RPCVs. The most common complaint expressed was that the 1-hour sessions were not long enough, which may indicate the perceived value of the group experience and actual needs of the RPCVs.

Likewise, students provided anecdotal feedback that the structured psychoeducational group with non-peers helped them to synthesize their learning of group counseling skills and to decrease their overall anxiousness about conducting group counseling. The authors observed increased student confidence and knowledge of group

counseling implementation following the group leadership experience with the RPCVs. Students also reported an increased awareness of and appreciation for the service of RPCVs, including learning secondhand about internationally diverse cultures and the unique experience of the RPCVs as expatriates. The combined feedback from RPCVs and students, along with observed increase in students' confidence and reported skills, may suggest that the culminating assignment did indeed maximize student learning.

Resources for Partnerships

Not every counselor education program is fortunate enough to have a fully operational training clinic where students from the university or members of the community can partake in a group counseling experience on campus. Students may be able to lead groups at other locations, including clinical mental health agencies, schools and other related counseling agencies (Stockton & Toth, 1996). A need exists for counselor educators to identify agencies that could utilize the skills and resources provided by group counseling students, and that would be open to having counseling students provide services to the agency volunteers or employees.

The Peace Corps is certainly a prime example of this type of agency; whereby RPCVs often struggle with reentry issues (e.g., interpersonal concerns, career transition) and could benefit from structured psychoeducational groups. Interacting with the RPCVs reportedly has been a humbling experience for students in the group counseling course, who recognize the talent and sacrifices that these individuals made to serve others. Students often stated that it was an honor to work with RPCVs during the group counseling course.

There are a number of national agencies that, like the Peace Corps, may have a need for debriefing volunteers and employees who have been through some life-changing event as a result of their work with the agency. By teaming up with such agencies, the partnership may become mutually beneficial for volunteers/employees of the agency and the group counseling students. A list of possible agencies and websites is provided for future partnerships with counselor education programs (see Table 1). By visiting these agency websites, counselor educators may find a local or regional office in close proximity to their university and establish a rewarding partnership for all.

Table 1

Potential Agencies for Partnerships

Agency	Web site
AmeriCorps	http://www.americorps.gov/
AmeriCorps VISTA	http://www.americorps.gov/for_individuals/choose/vista.asp
City Year	http://www.cityyear.org
Corporation for National and Community Service	http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/programs/index.asp
Job Corps	http://www.jobcorps.gov
National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC)	http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/nccc.asp
Peace Corps and Returning Peace Corps Volunteers	http://www.peacecorps.gov/
Senior Corps	http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/programs/seniorcorps.asp
Teach for America	http://www.teachforamerica.org
U.S. Department of Defense (including military branches and programs for military personnel, veterans, civilians and family members of those who serve)	http://www.defense.gov

Another possibility for a mutually beneficial partnership is to offer group counseling services to the international student population at the counselor education program's university. Often-times, international students are dealing with transition and acculturation issues similar to that of the RPCVs. Structured psychoeducational groups could provide needed information and time to process acclimation of international students to a different culture and educational system. Group counseling students would have the opportunity to increase their cultural awareness and develop appropriate culturally-sensitive interventions (Bodenhorn, DeCarla Jackson, & Farrell, 2005). This is just one other example of how group counseling students, group members, and counselor education programs can benefit from such partnerships. Counselor educators are encouraged to explore possible opportunities for similar partnerships with local agencies, schools and universities.

Conclusion

Research, professional standards, and accrediting bodies all indicate that an experiential group process is a crucial dimension of group counseling course curriculum. Group leadership further synthesizes and cements group counseling skills and processes learned throughout a group counseling course. While peer experiential groups are beneficial for students, conducting a structured psychoeducational group with non-peers may maximize student learning by teaching valuable skills that can be transferred to clinical mental health and school settings. Conyne et al. (1997) stated that exemplary preparation programs often included experiential learning opportunities, such as supervised students facilitating group counseling to non-students, and serving the community through their group work, both of which were utilized in the described partnership with the Peace Corps.

Best practices also recommend that students gain experience counseling and serving diverse clients. Collaborating with agencies whose employees and volunteers engaged in an international experience offers counselor educators the opportunity to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship: (a) group counseling students receive valuable supervised clinical experience serving clients with diverse experiences; and (b) clients receive needed assistance through difficult transitions. Partnering with an agency with an international focus may increase students' multicultural competencies and help recruit diverse counselor education students to the preparation program. Overall, collaborating with the Peace Corp was a win-win situation for the described counselor education program: counseling students maximized their learning of group counseling skills within a multicultural-laden context, and RPCVs gained crucial services to assist in their life transition.

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Appendix

Example Assignment Descriptions for Syllabus

I. Group Counseling Proposal Assignment

Students are required to develop a proposal for a 1-hour psychoeducational group to be conducted with RPCVs. The proposal should be 8–10 pages and include current literature. The proposal outline is as follows:

- Purpose and goals of the group
- Eligibility criteria, recruitment strategies, and screening techniques (e.g., RPCVs selected based on interest in program topic, screened by PC staff)
- Length, frequency, duration of group (e.g., a single 1-hour group session)
- Appropriate leadership style and roles
- Appropriate group norms, process, and procedures (e.g., structure and relevant activities)
- Demonstration of the various stages of the group process
- Ethical considerations
- Cultural considerations
- Evaluation criteria: What will determine whether group goals have been met?
- Summary: Briefly summarize your proposal and rationale.

II. Group Leadership/Facilitation/Reflection Paper

Students will co-lead a 1-hour psychoeducational group for RPCVs. The group will be based on your written proposal. Feedback will be provided to you regarding your proposal prior to conducting the group. After the session, you and your co-facilitator will each write a two-page reflection paper on the group process that took place under your leadership. The reflection paper will include your analysis of the following:

- What group stages did the group experience?
- What do you believe would be needed for the group to function more effectively?
- Which techniques did you actually use in the session?
- How did you incorporate a theoretical framework into the session?
- Were the desired group goals/outcomes achieved?
- How did your group leadership influence these goals/outcomes?
- If you were able to have an additional session, what direction would you take the group?
- What were your own strengths and areas of growth as a group leader within the session?

nbcc