

I-IT-WE:



A practical strategy for teaching group work to undergraduate social work students

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IT

What we're
doing and why
we're doing it

I

Individual
contribution,
relational
investment and
participation

WE

Collective
contribution;
relational
engagement and
participation

Image: Daily Minimal. (July2017). Daily Minimal. Retrieved from <http://www.dailyminimal.com/post/162672123674/jl17-964-a-new-geometric-design-every-day>

Background and course context



- The strategy is used in an undergraduate professional practice class to equip students novice to group work practice with a conceptual lens aimed at connecting group work theory with practice
- The group work component of the course is taught in an intensive 6-week block, located immediately before the programme's first practicum
- The course overall is predicated on an integrative pedagogy designed to facilitate growth in the relational and reflective use of self

Task-based group assignment



- The group work teaching component aligns with the wider pedagogical goals of the course through engaging students in an intersubjective experience of being a member of a small task-based assignment group, within the larger class
- Skills in the purposeful use of self are developed further by the relational interaction required of group work
- The task-group assignment requires students to participate in a pre-assigned small group to research the efficacy of a specific group type toward addressing the functional challenge(s) presented by the groups' chosen population and psycho-social issue

An assignment snippet



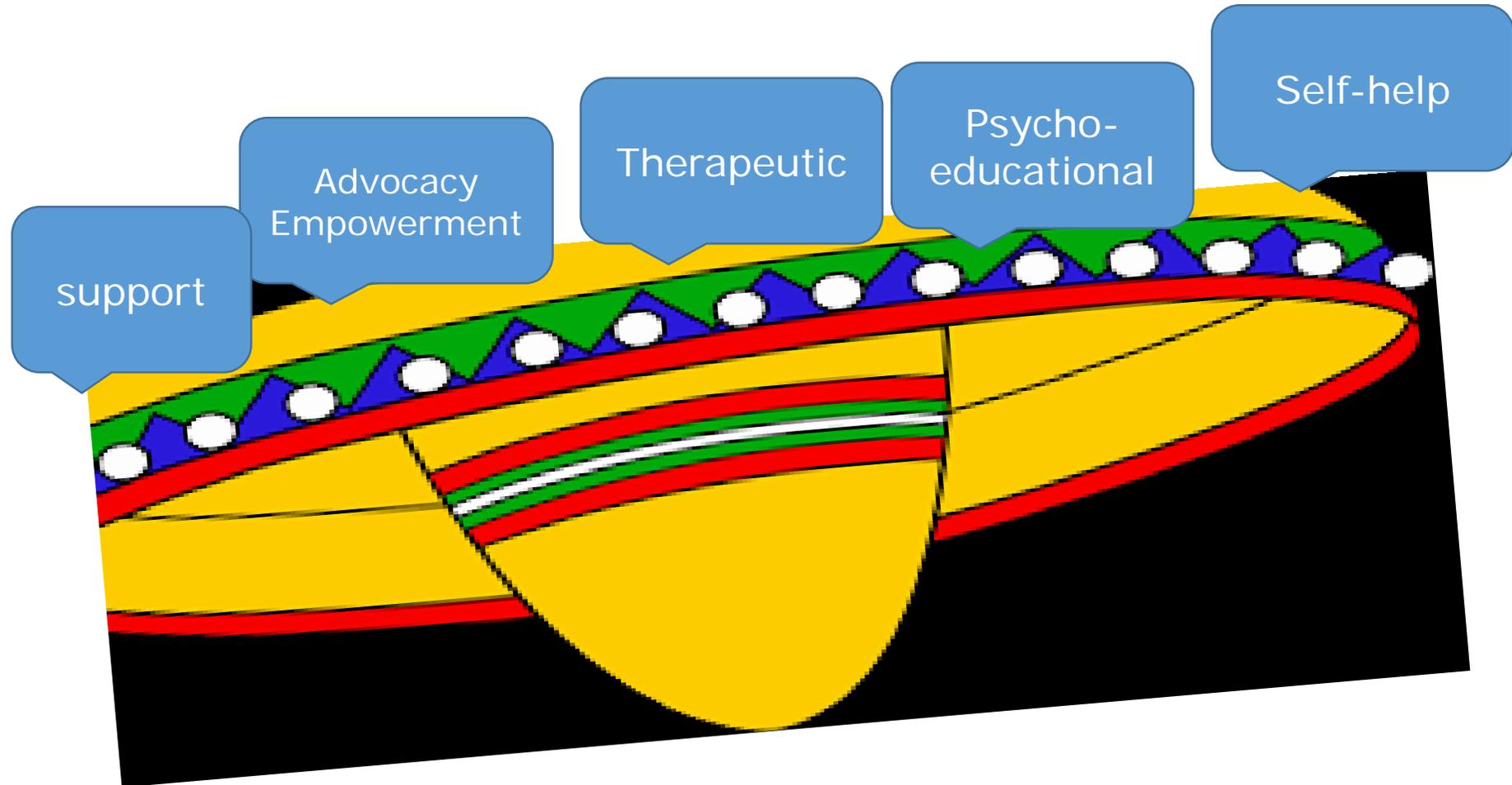
‘This report has been configured using contemporary evidence-informed literature to critically research and explain the purpose, goals, and processes of a support group for the bereaved adult population.’

Psycho-
social
issue

Population

Group
type

Hat draw: the FIVE group types



Group work model & group composition



- Tuckman's five stage model is taught in the course (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977)
- Group membership is pre-assigned by colleagues in a related practice-based course
- Group composition criteria is based on diversity and difference, such as gender, age, life experience, culture and academic literacy
- Group size, consistent with optimal numbers for an effective small group, ranges between 6-8 members per group (Yalom, 2005)

Some teaching messages from group work literature



- Group work theory and practice is supported by a well established literature base (Shulman, 1987; Toseland, & Rivas, 2012; Yalom, 2005)
- Instructional literature on teaching group work to undergraduate social work students is more variable
- Of that literature, some privilege didactic instruction as a key group work teaching method, comprising: lectures, course readings, videos, case studies and class discussions (Berger, 1996; Dennison, 2005)
- More recently, social work educators have argued for use of a blended teaching approach pairing didactic instruction with both experiential and reflective practice activities (Humphrey, 2014; Warkentin, 2017)

I-IT-WE

Translating group work teaching messages into practice

- A blended teaching approach is compatible with the use of 'I-IT-WE'
- A fourfold blended teaching approach supports group work learning: (1) Didactic instruction; (2) Task-focussed assignment research; (3) Participation in a small group; (4) A 'UOS' reflection
- The strategy equips students with a perceptual lens for making sense of group work theory and process, supported by practice
- As a frame of reference, the strategy also offers a useful way for novice learners to layer their learning about group work method and process, as the course progresses

Reflective Practice Aptitudes

- Non-judgement
- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Acceptance

I

What:

- Do I bring to this encounter?
- Might my strengths and struggles be?
- Do I hope to gain?
- Do I fear?
- Do I need to feel safe?
- Do I expect of myself and others?
- Might others expect/need from me?
- Am I responsible/accountable for?

IT

Purpose: Introduction to group work knowledge, principles and process through engagement in a task-group assignment

Sessional focus: Group formation

Sessional objectives:

- Develop a working agreement
- Establish a preliminary task group plan
- Create a communication strategy
- Allocate key group roles

WE

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Co-operation
- Clarification
- Consolidation
- Conflict resolution
- Contract formulation
- Decision making
- Contract renegotiation

Experiential exercise 2: (WE) Getting to know one another



Name

**Something about the self,
unknown to others**

**Previous group work
experience**

**Greatest worry about
working in a group**

**What need to feel
comfortable and confident
Working in this group**

Awareness

A 'Use of Self' reflection

I noticed, when working in the group, I tended to take a back-seat, and if there are others who have a more dominant personality then I let them take the lead. After using mindfulness practice and this fact coming to the surface, *with curiosity* I attempted to discover where this trait came about, *on looking back*, from my understanding it is a cultural trait I carry. Growing up in a *Samoan family* and attending school in Samoa, I was not encouraged to voice my opinion, or contribute to family discussions. So taking quite a passive role is something that I have grown up with. *On realizing* this, I *consciously decided* to make more of an effort to contribute to the group discussions. I put my hand up to take on various roles within the group. Leading groups and making contributions in group discussions is an important part of social work, and is an area I am now aware that I need to grow in (Ata, yr 3)

Observing mind

Insight

Transformative moment

Action plan

(Chinnery & Beddoe, 2011)

Student evaluation of the group work teaching

“The interactive classroom setting was helpful for the group work”

“The group assignment and learnings around group formation and working styles was very helpful and useful – even now out on practicum group work is necessary”

... I was satisfied with the quality of the small-group teaching associated with this course. (93.0%)

“Mindfulness learning and practices, understanding the necessity of self-care and how to practically apply it Working in a group and using the processes”

“I liked Working in groups”

“The group work exercise was challenging and I learnt a lot about myself in relation to working as part of a team”

... I was satisfied with the quality of the small-group teaching (eg, tutorial, laboratory, seminar) associated with this course. (81.0 %)

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