

career. One dream I have is to create an inter-generational community art center. It is a way in which I can actualize the principles I feel so strongly about: relationships, self-expression, self-worth, giving people a place to use their verbal and non-verbal voice, and learning from others. Art bonds people; it is so powerful. It speaks to people on many levels. Being able to express oneself through a creative venue helps build self-esteem, opens up the heart and mind to new ways of thinking about the world. Most importantly, it gives people a voice. Making art together builds relationships among people of all ages; it brings communities of people together. It is a wonderful medium to use to promote individual and collective change. This is one of many dreams I plan to fulfill one day. As for now, I will keep searching for the pearls.

NOTE

1. Gisela Konopka, *Social Group Work: A Helping Process* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 3-5.

The Power of Purposeful Sessional Endings in Each Group Encounter

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ABSTRACT. Group work methodology recognizes that single sessions have beginning, middle and ending phases. The ending phase is most neglected. Practitioners are often unaware of its importance and unprepared to facilitate purposeful sessional endings. The article aims to conceptualize the ending phase looking at its generic and specialized application to different group types and populations. It explores common ways practitioners end sessions, obstacles to implementing sessional endings, benefits purposeful sessional endings have for the individual and group and practice skills needed to conduct these endings. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getting@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2000 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Individual and group development is enhanced when the group worker recognizes that single sessions have beginning, middle and ending phases. Each session is viewed as a whole with interrelated parts (Schwartz, 1971). In the beginning phase, the work of the session is defined and agreed upon by the worker and members. The middle

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phase focuses on doing sessional work while attending to the group process. In the ending phase, the group evaluates and reflects upon its work and makes connections between sessions. Through completion of the sessional phases, the group life cycle is experienced in each session.

This article focuses on the ending phase, which is the most neglected of the sessional group phases. The goal is to conceptualize the ending phase by exploring its generic and specialized application to different group types and populations. Specifically, the article explores: (a) common ways in which practitioners end sessions; (b) obstacles to implementing sessional endings; (c) benefits of purposeful sessional endings for the individual and the group; (d) influences of stages of group development on sessional endings; (e) uses of sessional endings in both short-term and open-ended groups, and (f) skills required to achieve these endings.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that practitioners are often unaware of the importance of sessional endings, as well as unprepared to facilitate purposeful sessional endings. The purposeful use of the ending phase requires a "mind set" toward practice that is based upon a conceptual framework. This framework includes the tasks for conducting sessional endings and the skills required of the worker. Practice examples of sessional endings are drawn from the authors' experience and from the application of the framework on the part of second year MSW social group work students in field placement.

For the purposes of this discussion, sessional endings refer to evaluation of (1) member goals; (2) group content and process; and, (3) the role of the worker. It also refers to establishing closure and transition between sessions. This issue is important because the sessional ending process encourages members to take responsibility for group life and make decisions about group functioning which leads to member feelings of group "ownership." Other gains are a sense of satisfaction that members realize from recognizing what has been accomplished individually and as a group during the session. As a result, an increased appreciation of the helping process among members may occur.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Group work texts, i.e., Northern (1988), Garvin (1981), Brandler and Roman (1991) and the Journal, *Social Work with Groups* were

reviewed for content on sessional endings. Seldom is the ending phase of individual sessions mentioned in the group work practice literature. A review of the Journal, *Social Work with Groups* from 1990-1997 revealed that out of 88 group practice articles, only four referred to the use of sessional endings: Gutierrez and Ortega (1991); Charming, Bell and Strecker (1992); Rodway (1992) and Stempler (1993). The articles indicated how the ending phase was used by facilitators and participants. They referred to summarization of group content and process, reflection about the group experience, evaluation and closure. Discussion was missing on transition between sessions and the impact of the sessional ending on the group as a whole.

Sessional endings were most thoroughly explored by Schwartz (1971). He conceptualizes each group encounter as having a preparatory, beginning, middle, and ending phase. Schwartz distinguishes between the temporary or single meeting and permanent ending which brings the group life to a close.

He writes:

As I discuss each of these phases, I am suggesting that they apply not only to the total group experience but to each of the separate meetings that comprise it. Each encounter has its own tuning in, beginning, middle, and end-transitions, the same logic and the same necessities of work make the terms of the analysis equally applicable, although considerable work remains to be done in testing out the details of this conception in action. (p. 13)

Shulman (1992), building on Schwartz's ideas (1971), connects the ending and transition phase to stages of group development. For example, he describes the ending with a couples group in the beginning stage.

We have five minutes left. This was our first session. I would like you to take a few minutes to share with each other and with us what your reactions are. What are your feelings and your thoughts? How has this session hit you? What will you be saying to each other on your way home in the car about this evening's session. It is important that you say it now. (p. 334)

A few group work texts used in social work education briefly refer to the sessional ending phase. Glassman and Kates (1990) mention

benefits derived from sessional closure and the transition between meetings. Brown (1991) discusses the development of group norms for sessional endings. Toseland and Rivas (1995) identify tasks for ending single sessions in treatment and task groups such as: resolving remaining conflicts, reviewing and summarizing the group's work, and planning for future meetings.

HOW GROUP SESSIONS TYPICALLY END

Process recordings and discussions with group practitioners reveal that sessional work focuses primarily on beginning and middle phases and groups often terminate without an ending phase. Individual sessions tend to end abruptly; often the group is engaged in active discussion or activity when time runs out. The worker may typically say, "We have to stop now, I will see you next week." As Corey and Corey (1982) indicate, "Too often a leader will simply announce that time is up for today, with no attempt to summarize and integrate and with no encouragement for members to practice certain skills" (p. 115).

Some endings have more structure, such as time when the practitioner praises the members and points out positive aspects of the session. In a clinical example, a worker noted how she had ended the session by thanking the members for coming and being candid about their feelings. Other typical types of endings include the worker's providing a summarization of group content or offering information about future group activity.

These characteristic endings indicate the absence of member and group involvement as well as control by the worker over the ending process. Steinberg (1993) discusses the issue:

Feelings about, and the exercise of, control reflect in capsule form attitudes about the helping relationship about who can and should be doing what for, to, and with whom. The greater the maintenance of control by the worker, the less the ability of group members to assume responsibility. (p. 28)

Why are sessional endings neglected? What accounts for the lack of clear and purposeful endings? The following discussion offers some possible explanations.

The scant emphasis devoted in the literature to sessional endings is

reflective of and affects day-to-day practice. Practitioners have little exposure to the benefits of purposeful sessional endings. Practitioners also hold misconceptions about the conducting of sessional endings, such as: (1) it takes away substance from the work of the group, (2) using time to reflect upon sessional work is repetitious, (3) and evaluation belongs in the termination stage of group development and does not apply to single sessions. Workers' feelings about termination may affect sessional work. As Mayadas and Glaser (1981) state:

... the truism of "what begins, also must end" is frequently given only cursory recognition. This may be attributed to factors inherent in the act of termination itself which allegedly signifies a state of mixed emotions for all parties concerned. (p. 193)

Another explanation is that practitioners have difficulty relinquishing control of the group to its members. Clinical experience indicates that practitioners may fear hearing negative comments about the group or the worker and may try to contain such expression by avoiding a sessional evaluation. This practice may start in the beginning stage of group development when there is a tendency for the worker to feel vulnerable and overly concerned about how well the group is progressing.

Members may raise objections to having a sessional ending, believing it takes valuable time away from discussion of their issues. As a result, the worker may back away rather than recognize the resistance as an opportunity for education about the benefits of sessional endings.

BENEFITS OF PURPOSEFUL SESSIONAL ENDINGS

The sessional ending phase provides a natural and specific opportunity to review and evaluate the session as a whole. This process offers many interrelated benefits that reinforce and integrate individual learning and group development. The benefits of purposeful sessional endings include reflection, transition between sessions, closure, empowerment and a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Reflection

Sessional endings allow for reflection as members discuss what meaning the group encounter had for them individually and as a group.

The reflective process entails (1) focusing on the group experience, (2) looking back upon the experience to see what it meant, (3) analyzing its significance, and (4) examining what the members can take away and apply to their lives outside the group. Corey and Corey (1982), mention the importance of reflection.

Some time, if even only ten minutes, should be set aside to give participants an opportunity to reflect on what they liked or did not like about the session, to mention what they hope to do out of group during the week, to express how they feel about what they did or did not do, and so forth. (p. 115)

The following excerpts of a sessional ending during the fifth session of a Welfare To Work Group concentrating on job readiness illustrate some of the ways reflection occurs as members share what was gained from the session.

Some express learnings about themselves and changes they expect to make in their behavior.

Joan: Today's discussion will help me to begin to work on my communication problem, try to confront instead of just walking away and keeping it locked up in my mind. Because I have more to gain when I confront the person than when I just keep it to myself and suffer in silence.

Mary: I have learned today that getting back at the person will not solve the problem it will only compound it, and in a work environment that could be very unproductive. So next time I will talk.

Others are insightful about interactive learning and the mutual aid process in the group.

Susan: Having to reflect on our feelings and thoughts at the end of each session has been very useful because I have learned a lot from everybody here. I have improved on my job interview skills, my communication, and other skills. I also believe that I have found a friend in all of the women, because two weeks ago when I was sick most of the members called me to see how I was doing. I must tell you that I have never had that before this time, so thanks to everybody.

Carolyn: I have never seen a group of women that support each other this much, and I hope that even after we leave here that we will continue to be friends. And like I said before whatever I learn here I will teach my children because it will help them to better themselves in the future. I feel the support and the trust that has developed among all of us.

A member refers to the changes she has made in her life outside the group.

Tracy: Coming and being part of this group, and participating in the discussion has really helped me in dealing with a lot of my personal issues. I am dealing with my anger better, I am communicating better with my children, and I am not saying that I am completely okay, but I am learning to deal and cope better. We have trust, and I believe that I can count on your support.

To encourage reflective thinking, the worker can ask generic questions that stimulate members to think about what was shared and learned as well as their thoughts and feelings about group functioning. The usefulness of the sessional ending can be advanced by asking specific questions that consider the purpose of the group and the needs of the population. Care should be taken in the ending to keep reflection focused on the experience that just transpired and to avoid opening the group up to new content.

Transition Between Sessions

The work of the group is enhanced when connections are made between single sessions. Each session should provide direction for the next group encounter. Continuity is established between sessions as future group activities are identified and agreed upon by the group. Shulman (1992) identifies this objective: "To gain some consensus on the part of group members as to the specific next steps; for example, what are the central themes or issues with which they wish to begin the following week's discussion?" (p. 317). As a result of the ending and transition experience, members have both a stake and know what to expect in the following session which heightens motivation to attend and engage in the work of the group. "By prompting the members to think about the upcoming session, it also indirectly encourages them

to stick to their contracts during the week?" (Corey and Corey, 1982, p. 116).

Sessional Closure

Closure means that when the session is over members have a sense of conclusion to and completion of the group experience. It involves identifying unfinished work for consideration during the next session. To achieve closure requires that the ending be structured to allow time for a debriefing and wrap up of the session. Members often need to deal with unresolved issues, feelings and remaining questions. As Glassman and Kates (1990) indicate:

By providing the members with this structure and approach for expressing their reaction to a meeting and its conclusion, the practitioner's intention is to prevent dissatisfactions from festering between meetings and into the next one. (p. 143)

When the ending is unproductive and spillover occurs, the worker can use the ending experience as content for the next meeting.

Sessional closure has special relevance to settings where clients attend multiple groups on a daily basis, such as in psychiatric rehabilitation programs and senior centers. Members need to close off each group experience before starting the next. Otherwise, they may become confused about the purpose and goals of the different groups they attend and unfinished business can be inappropriately transferred between groups. Another consequence to the lack of closure is that members may seek the worker out after the group has ended to discuss individual and group issues that belonged in group.

Empowerment

Feelings of powerlessness arise from a sense of dependency and awareness that one cannot influence or exert change over one's environment. Haggstrom (1964) stresses the importance of decision making for social development.

Human personality is a process of decisions and actions on the basis of decisions. One becomes fully human only through acting in important areas of one's life. All social arrangements which

take responsibility out of the hands of the poor, which make decisions and action more difficult or operative over a more restricted area, feed the psychology of powerlessness. (p. 218)

The sessional ending provides a context to enhance the development of individual and group empowerment. This occurs as members have a say about group content, how the group functions, and the role of the worker. As a result, members assume accountability for the group. Breton (1994) identifies this dimension of empowerment.

One of the most salient effects of the consciousness raising process is that one discovers or realizes that one has a voice, that one has the right to speak up, the right to say and to have a say. Consciousness-raising is a process of liberation from voicelessness or from silence. (p. 26)

Sense of Satisfaction and Accomplishment

An overall sense of individual and group satisfaction and accomplishment evolves from purposeful sessional endings that include reflective thinking, the establishment of closure, and empowerment experiences. Contributing to this sense is the greater clarity members gain about how the session has benefited them. The ending phase helps to increase understanding of the need members have for one another and the group as a mutual aid system.

PRACTICE SKILLS FOR PURPOSEFUL SESSIONAL ENDINGS

Purposeful sessional endings require certain group practice skills. They include allocating time, developing norms, soliciting feedback, reaching for discrepant points of view and attention to both content and process.

Allocation of Time

A concern of practitioners is not having sufficient time to include a sessional ending. They feel pressed to continue the work phase until

the "bell is about to ring." Setting aside time for a sessional ending involves a skill. Shoemaker (1960) points out that the worker may have to learn how to accelerate the group process to help the group move through the sessional phases. The allocation of time allows for a smooth transition between the work and ending phases. While no hard and fast rule exists, five to fifteen minutes for a 60 to 90 minute group should be considered for this ending phase.

Developing Norms

Brown (1991) discusses developing group norms for sessional endings.

Setting aside ten minutes or so for summing up each session should be discussed with the group during early meetings, so that it is understood as part of individual and group development. If group members can agree that this is a valuable use of time, which needs to be protected, it will make it easier for the worker to restrict new and potentially time-consuming topics from being introduced toward the end of the meeting. The expectations about how to use the last ten minutes should be made clear. (p. 219)

In establishing norms for sessional endings, it is important to consider that when the idea is introduced for the first time, members may express surprise, doubt and be oppositional. Usually a group is more accepting when the sessional ending is a part of the group contract from the outset of group formation than when it is introduced at a later time. Practice experience, however, suggests that as the group encounters the benefits of sessional endings they are likely to embrace it. When introducing the concept, a worker might say, "I think it would be beneficial if we took ten minutes at the end to talk about today's group. Discussing what occurred today in our group will be helpful in evaluating individual and group development."

A worker with a residents' council in an inpatient psychiatric facility describes the introduction of the sessional ending in the middle stage of the group's life and how a norm developed.

I consciously allocated the last ten minutes of the meeting to elicit member's reactions to the group and plan for the future. The changed format, namely ending in this way, was surprising

to group members and somewhat uncomfortable for me, but I like it and feel it is more helpful than my previous action of thanking group members for attending the groups.

In the session that followed a number of the members were absent, which was unusual. For a brief time I wondered whether my attempt at using the sessional ending had caused members to stay away, but I quickly dismissed the thought. I asked for members' reaction to the work we did in the last ten minutes of the previous group. They said it was helpful and accepted the idea of ending in this way, so we now have a new norm for the group.

As a way of cultivating norms, the worker should encourage group members to assess the benefits of sessional endings. For example, in a treatment group, which a worker had recently inherited, the members were asked to discuss what meaning the session had for them. Members commented on their increased sense of trust and comfort with the worker and acknowledged that they had shared intimate aspects of themselves, including childhood sexual abuse. As a follow-up, the worker asked for feedback about the ending process itself. Members stated it was helpful to acknowledge and discuss their own growth. They contrasted the sessional ending with prior group experience when the group just seemed to fade into silence and end.

Soliciting Feedback

Reaching for feedback about group progress and functioning can be intimidating because workers may fear that they will hear negative comments. Such fears tend to diminish as the group becomes accepting of the sessional ending and members use the opportunity to provide constructive ideas. As one worker noted:

Establishing sessional endings immediately lets it be understood that processing is part of the group experience. This is something I have struggled with. Asking for feedback scares me. I think I could have asked for more processing at the end of each session and have noticed that I have grown more comfortable and appreciative of its value to both the clients and myself as the worker.

It is important to convey a sense of openness and safety when soliciting feedback. Making a demand for specificity is helpful in the

beginning stage, as members tend to be general in the type of feedback they give. Members are likely to say, "Group was good today," in response to the worker's questions about group functioning.

Asking for more specific feedback can help reinforce therapeutic group norms and deepen member awareness. For instance, a worker asked a member what was good about the group in response to his general feedback that "group was good." The member responded that he had taken a risk by discussing his compulsive overeating, about which he felt ashamed. In addition, he found that the group was not judgmental or shaming. These comments stimulated a group discussion of the value of mutual aid. In the process, group norms for risk taking and non-judgmentalism were promoted. In another example, in a bereavement group for the elderly, when members stated that the session went well the worker asked for specific examples. A member replied:

I took a chance telling the group about my thoughts of killing myself. As first I was ashamed and I thought the rest of you would think I was weak and judge me, but you didn't, so I guess I got something out of the session.

Reaching for Discrepant Points of View

In the sessional ending, the worker should encourage the expression of different ideas and points of view. This skill is particularly useful in the beginning stage of group development, as it prepares the group for the expression and resolution of conflict. The following type of questions help to elicit differences: "Are there other thoughts, feelings, or opinions about the session?" or "While many of you have pointed out what you liked about group, I am wondering if there are any disappointments or dissatisfactions?" When this intervention is made in a group, it can lead to a group discussion of the worker's role and member responsibility.

In a joint training group designed to enhance group work skills, composed of line workers and supervisors, trainees were asked how they experienced the first session. Reactions were very favorable. The trainer asked if there were other reactions; a supervisor responded that she was quiet during the session out of concern about how she would be perceived by her supervisees in the group. The disclosure stimulated others to voice uncomfortable feelings about the group's com-

position, which led to discussion of the impact of differential status on group functioning. Further exploration of the issue, in the following session, contributed to greater group cohesiveness.

Attention to Both Group Content and Process

In the ending phase, practitioners are likely to focus on group content covered during the session and avoid dealing with group process. Content refers to the topics or issues covered and the expression of ideas. Process refers to the group as a whole and its interrelated parts, such as social interaction, purpose, relationships, roles, norms, conflict, and group cohesion, that influence group functioning and development (Northen, 1998). Attention to both content and process is necessary if members are to experience the benefits of sessional endings.

The questions that the worker asks influence what direction the sessional ending takes. For example, asking members what they learned or for a summary of the session will likely evoke content-related reactions. On the other hand, asking for thoughts about how members communicated with one another will likely evoke process responses. The worker can intentionally ask questions that address content or process depending on his/her assessment of the session.

STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Stages of group development influence the sessional ending and provide direction for the role of the worker. In the beginning stage, the practitioner needs to provide more structure than in later stages, as members tend to be unfamiliar with the sessional ending and question it. Structure entails allocating sufficient time, being consistent in having sessional endings, and educating the group to its benefits.

In the power and control stage, the sessional ending provides an outlet for members to put into words their differences. The practitioner can invite discussion about group purpose and goals, member relationships and the role of the worker, areas where conflict traditionally occurs (Garland et al., 1976). Part of the conflict may be the testing of norms established for the ending phase. The use of closure can assist in the management of conflict.

During the middle stage, when sessional endings have occurred regularly, the group is likely to take responsibility for the ending phase by initiating and directing the process. As one worker observed: "They started recapping the content on their own and asked each other: what did you learn today." Purposeful sessional endings appear to enhance the work of the termination stage, as members seem less resistant after experiencing the ending phase in individual sessions. As a worker with a parent's support group noted:

The sessional endings were especially useful to us during termination. Each ending served as a model of what to expect and what to strive for in the final session of our group regarding closure, review, evaluation, and exploration of feelings about endings.

Sessional Endings in Short-Term and Open-Ended Groups

The sessional ending phase has special application for short-term and open-ended groups. Under the influence of managed care, short term groups are both practical and popular. Group duration is usually no more than eight sessions and emphasizes goal setting, skill development, and a prescribed curriculum for each session. The short duration of the total group experience underscores the importance of the ending phase for evaluation of individual and group progress, and planning for the next session.

In open-ended groups, the ending phase becomes termination for some, as members enter and leave the group in each session. Practitioners frequently express frustration about the disruptive impact of members entering and leaving and the lack of clearly defined beginning, middle and ending phases. In this regard, Galinsky and Schopler (1985) indicate:

Although procedures for termination are not used as frequently as those for entry, their development merits consideration, old members need to express feelings related to loss, envy, abandonment, or pride in other accomplishments, to facilitate reintegration as they proceed with their work together. Even when members are only in the group for a brief period, there should be an opportunity to reflect on the experience and to evaluate its impact. (p. 76)

A practitioner with an open-ended group makes this observation about the sessional ending: "It serves as a kind of summary, giving the members a sense of accomplishment whether they'll come next time or not, and the worker a sense of satisfaction too." It is valuable in open-ended groups to establish norms for the sessional ending and to ritualize the ending so that it becomes a group pattern (Schopler & Galinsky, 1985).

CONCLUSION

The sessional ending is viewed as a natural part of the group life cycle in each group encounter. Our experience and that of students and practitioners who have made purposeful use of sessional endings is that they contribute significantly to the efficacy of group work practice. Endings are considered purposeful when opportunity exists for: reflective thinking, group closure, transition between sessions, and input into group functioning. Practice skills are necessary to conduct these endings. Among them are: allocation of time, developing norms, soliciting feedback, reaching for discrepant points of view, and paying attention to group content and process. Research is needed, as Schwartz (1971) indicates, to test out the conception of the ending phase in action. An analysis of the actual content of sessional endings with different group types and populations is required to further access the obstacles and benefits to their use and the practice skills of this phase of work.

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A Queer Idea: Using Group Work Principles to Strengthen Learning in a Sexual Minorities Seminar

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the application of group work principles to enhance personal, professional, and pedagogical awareness in a Master's level course on social work practice with sexual minorities. The instructor's overall objective was to create an educational support group in a seminar-like environment which would draw on the experience of class members as well as on the growing body of literature surrounding topics by and about gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people. The course was organized around group work principles, including mutuality, reciprocity, connection, shared leadership, collective empowerment, member ownership of the group, and a commitment to honoring diversity. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2000 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Bisexual, gay, lesbian, relational model of group development, sexual minorities, teaching, transgender

recently taught a graduate level elective titled "Social Work Practice with Sexual Minorities: Dykes, Fags, Queers and other Social

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