

Group Counselling Syllabus

Instructor: Ross Laird, Ph.D.

Telephone: 604-916-1675

Email: ross@rosslaird.info

Website: www.rosslaird.info

Location: Vancouver Community College, City Centre Campus

Schedule: 10 evening sessions

One Saturday: 9:30 am to 4:30 pm

Note: attendance of the Saturday class is required for course credit.

Course Intention

Working with groups is immensely rewarding and uniquely challenging, requiring of the facilitator a particular blend of professional skills and self-awareness that develops only through practice and experiment. This course is designed to offer learners a wide spectrum of both theoretical and experiential approaches to group work, focusing especially on core facilitation skills. We will examine group dynamics and evolution, interpersonal relationships (e.g. conflicts, alliances and other structures), leadership styles, curriculum development, and the role of health and healing practices. Particular attention will be given to developing effective facilitation strategies through achieving greater self-awareness and active sensing. Participants will also learn about the emerging models of group work which focus on collaboration, community-building and creativity.

Learning Goals

- To experience and experiment with the group format as a context for personal growth and change.
- To become familiar with current applications and theories of group work, with particular emphasis on the group as a dynamic and creative system.
- To explore multicultural and alternative approaches to group work, with an emphasis on understanding the role of culture within the group format.
- To examine the relationship between facilitation skills and self-awareness.

Learning Experiences

The course will include a variety of learning experiences contingent upon regular attendance and dedicated participation. Because group counselling is an interactive process, much of

the class time will be devoted to group experiential exercises, individual reflective tasks and practical assignments. An integral aspect of the class process will be the formation of a *class group* which will meet each session. The development of this group will be discussed in class. The intent is to give participants an opportunity to experience a modified form of group work within the class structure. This serves as a complement to the theoretical material offered. Completion of the group presentation, readings, and final paper (see Demonstration, below) form the balance of the class.

Required Course Texts

The required course reader is available from the Continuing Studies office. Proceeds from sales of the course reader contribute to a student bursary fund.

Suggested Reading

- Mindell, A. (1993). *The leader as martial artist*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Corey, G. and Corey, M. (2006). *Groups: process and practice*. Pacific Grove: Brooks Cole.
- Sun Tzu. (1996). *The art of war* (T. Cleary, Trans.). Boston: Shambhala. (Original work published BCE).
- London, P. (1989). *No more secondhand art: Awakening the artist within*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York: Norton.
- Storr, A. (1996). *Feet of clay: Saints, sinners, and madmen*. New York: Free Press.
- Pederson, P., and Locke, D. (Eds.) (2005). *Cultural and diversity issues in counseling*. Greensboro, NC.

Demonstration of Learning

Attendance and Participation

The expectation is that you will attend all sessions and involve yourself in the class process. (You may miss, under circumstances of illness or emergency, two sessions and still be granted credit. If you miss the Saturday class, course credit will not be granted.) Your willingness to engage creatively with the learning process, to take appropriate personal risks, and to participate in group activities are all central to your involvement in this class. Because developing a facilitation style is very much a process of blending your own personal awareness

with skills and practical techniques, your own emotional involvement in the class is as important as your academic knowledge of the material.

Assessment Criteria for Attendance and Participation

- Demonstration of commitment to the development of self-awareness.
- Openness to interpersonal process.
- Ability to participate in appropriate self-disclosure.
- Consideration of and responsiveness to others.
- Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself.
- Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of everyone in the class.
- Ability to take personal responsibility for learning.
- Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise.
- Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback.
- Willingness to speak up, to join conversations, and to contribute.

The above criteria represent 20 per cent of your course grade. Attendance is worth an additional 10 per cent. The combined total for participation and attendance is 30 per cent.

Design Paper

Group effectiveness can be greatly augmented by careful planning and attention to detail. This assignment is designed to have you consider some of the core considerations important to making a group run smoothly. Using the discussions and material from class, selections from the text and your own research (citing at least 3 books or articles from the field), design a group for a specific population. Use as much of your own authenticity and creativity as you can, bearing in mind that groups run best when the leader stays true to his or her own needs. The paper should be 8 to 10 pages in length, double-spaced. It has three main sections, as shown below (suggested content is given for each area).

Section 1: Design and Rationale

Why are you running this group? What does it mean to you? Why is there a need for it? Specify design details such as how long your group will run, how many members it will have, where it will be held, how you will get clients and so on. How will you facilitate? Will you get help? If so, why? What population-specific concerns do you have? How will you meet those concerns? What general guidelines will you provide to participants to help build safety and trust?

Section 2: Self Awareness

What specific goals and expectations will you have for yourself (and for group members)? What will you need to be most aware of so that you avoid your common character traps? What will be your main personal challenge in running the group? What kinds of clients particularly stir you up? What kinds of situations? How will you handle these as they arise? What is your greatest strength or asset in running the group? How will you ensure you don't lose sight of it?

Section 3: Sessional Outline

Provide an outline for each session which includes content or themes, exercises and scheduling. If you plan to adapt exercises from our class, simply mention the names of them. If you design or use your own exercises, provide a description of each (and citation, if appropriate). Provide supporting handouts or materials as required.

Assessment Criteria for the Design Paper

- Commitment to the development of professional self-awareness.
- Awareness of personal strengths and challenges in facilitation.
- Ability to apply themes of personal development to the professional setting.
- Originality and creativity.
- Comprehensiveness of the group design.
- Application of new learning from class.
- Consideration of and responsiveness to potential problems in the proposed group.
- Quality of composition.

- Clarity and organization.
- References to similar materials or programs (at least three are required).

The first item in the above list is worth 10 per cent of the course grade. The remaining items comprise 30 per cent, for a total of 40 per cent of the course grade. The design paper is due in evening session nine (the second to last class).

Group Presentation

Each participant will help develop, with two or three other class members, a practice facilitation exercise to be completed in one of the last 5 sessions of the course. The schedule will be determined in class. Selecting a modality, exercise or approach, and with prior instructor approval, each group will practice facilitation (with the class as a practice group) for between 45 and 90 minutes. The practice facilitation exercises must provide an experiential component, a group discussion component, and an informational component. Additionally, each practice facilitation group must provide approximately equal practice facilitation time to each of its members. Each group will also prepare a one page summary of their modality or exercise (with short reference bibliography, as required) to present to each member of the group as a professional resource.

Assessment Criteria for the Group Presentation

- Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself.
- Willingness to speak up and to lead.
- Openness to interpersonal process.
- Willingness to collaborate with other practice co-facilitators.
- Consideration of and responsiveness to others.
- Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of everyone in the group.
- Willingness to examine personal values, beliefs, and judgments.
- Ability to take personal responsibility for learning.
- Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise.
- Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback.

The group presentation is worth 30 per cent of the course grade.

Assessment of Learning

Assessment will be based on class participation, the group presentation, and completion of the research paper. Please review the information on the previous pages for details about each assignment. Also please consult the assessment forms, which appear in the next section. These forms, completed by me, will be provided to you after each of your assignments.

Assessment Philosophy

Counselling is a unique profession. Unlike many other fields, in which competence and skill may be measured objectively, using replicable and consistent means (tests of factual knowledge, for example), counselling skill depends almost entirely on the interpersonal skills of the practitioner. Computer programmers can be assessed by their ability to write code; chiropractors can be evaluated based on their skill at manipulating the human skeleton; race car drivers can be clocked around a track. But for counsellors there are no such fixed measures. Interpersonal skills are subtle, difficult to quantify, and complex beyond any measurement scheme.

And yet we can identify those who possess exemplary personal skills. They are relaxed, open, responsive, kind. Often they exhibit skills that we tend to assign to the social sphere: personal warmth, consideration of others, hesitancy to judge, sensitivity to emotions. To some extent, these features – which are aspects of temperament more than they are learned skills – can be evaluated using rating scales based on observation. Empathy rating scales are often used for this purpose in counselling training programs. Such scales, or other, similar assessment measures, are useful as baselines, or starting points; but they cannot replace the interpretations of peers and colleagues – of regular people, in other words – in assessing the interpersonal skills of a counsellor. There are simply far too many factors in interpersonal communication for any standardized evaluation procedure to measure.

Practicing counsellors are assessed by their clients and to a lesser extent by their colleagues. In all large-scale studies that have examined satisfaction and success in counselling, clients consistently report that their trust of the counsellor and their feelings of good will in the relationship were the most important factors in contributing to growth and change. Counselling approach appears to be irrelevant, essentially, with regard to the progress clients make in counselling.

Counsellors in training have fewer opportunities to be assessed by their clients. Instead, they must be assessed by their student peers and by their counselling instructors. The process of this assessment works best when it takes into account the subtle interpersonal factors describe above. These include (but are not limited to):

- Commitment to the development of self-awareness.

- Openness to interpersonal process.
- Ability to participate in appropriate self-disclosure.
- Consideration of and responsiveness to others.
- Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of everyone in the class.
- Willingness to examine personal values, beliefs, and judgments.
- Ability to take personal responsibility for learning.
- Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise.
- Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback.

Each item on this list is an aspect of the first item: self-awareness. The most proficient counsellors are those who demonstrate commitment to self-awareness. They consistently query their own responses, thoughts, and feelings. They ask themselves:

- What am I feeling right now?
- What am I thinking right now?
- Why am I reacting in this particular way?
- What do my thoughts, feelings, and reactions tell me about myself?
- Is there anything about my current behavior that suggests unresolved themes in my life?
- Is my perception of myself consistent with what other people tell me about the kind of person I am?
- When and how do I get stuck, and what am I doing to work on this?
- In what ways do I get overwhelmed, or shut down, or avoid?

These questions, and many others, require the capacity for self-reflection and self-awareness. As we continue in the course, you may wish to consider these questions as they apply to you. At the very least, you might wish to consider what you are currently working on in your life, in which direction your attention is drawn, into which of the innumerable themes of human nature you are now called to delve.

In my role as your instructor, I will be paying attention to how thoughtful you are in examining and responding to questions like those in the first list above. I will not be analyzing

you, but rather noticing what kinds of things you do, what your reactions are to various situations. This is a basic counselling skill and one which I will demonstrate repeatedly throughout the course. My goal in observing your behaviors and interacting with you is to assist you in developing greater self-awareness. Self-awareness is the most foundational counselling skill, and is therefore an aspect of assessment in this course.

I will use the self-awareness list above, as well as the assessment criteria listed for each assignment, to assess your overall participation in the course. I will not be evaluating your level of self-awareness but rather your openness to the process of developing your self-awareness.

Grade Inflation

Almost every semester there are students who do well on the assignments, complete all the associated learning goals of the course, participate well, and wonder why they do not receive a grade of one hundred percent (or 98, anyway). Here is the reason: almost every semester there are students who demonstrates a level of commitment that goes beyond the course requirement. Such students complete extra work, or hand in exemplary assignments, or undertake a significant amount of personal development in addition to the course expectations. Such students typically receive the highest grades.

If you do reasonably well in the course you will receive a reasonable grade. Very high grades are intended for extra or exemplary work. Unfortunately, over the past thirty years the post-secondary educational system in North America has participated in a process of grade inflation. Since the 1980's, the average grade for typical course work has been increasing by about 25 per cent each decade. Elevated assessments do not accurately reflect the work of most students. Even worse, grade inflation has caused many students to expect high grades for average work. I am not a particularly stringent assessor; but I will not inflate grades artificially.

The grades for the course will be distributed along a curve, with a small number of students (likely) receiving high grades, most students receiving grades in the middle range, and a few students struggling with lower grades. If you are uncertain about your assessment for a given assignment, or if you wish to know where, roughly, you are along the distribution curve of the class, or if you would like suggestions for how to improve your grade, please ask me for clarification.

Assessment Forms

These forms are used by me to assess your involvement in the class. The rankings, from 0 to 3, represent the following:

0: Failed to complete the given criteria

1: Approaches course goals for the given criteria; some work still needed

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2: Meets expected course goals

3: Exceeds course goals

Attendance and Participation

Assessment Criteria	Level
Attendance	/10
Commitment to the development of self-awareness	1 2 3
Openness to interpersonal process	1 2 3
Ability to participate in appropriate self-disclosure	1 2 3
Consideration of and responsiveness to others	1 2 3
Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself	1 2 3
Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of all class members	1 2 3
Ability to take personal responsibility for learning	1 2 3
Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise	1 2 3
Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback	1 2 3
Willingness to speak up, to join conversations, and to contribute	1 2 3

Group Design Paper

Assessment Criteria	Level
Commitment to the development of professional self-awareness	/10
Awareness of personal strengths and challenges in facilitation	1 2 3
Ability to apply themes of personal development to the professional setting	1 2 3
Originality and creativity	1 2 3
Comprehensiveness of the group design	1 2 3
Application of new learning from class	1 2 3
Consideration of and responsiveness to potential problems	1 2 3
Quality of composition	1 2 3
Clarity and organization	1 2 3
References to similar materials or programs	1 2 3
Considerations of future development	1 2 3

Group Presentation

Assessment Criteria	Level
Willingness to take appropriate risks and to challenge oneself	I 2 3
Willingness to speak up and to lead	I 2 3
Openness to interpersonal process	I 2 3
Willingness to collaborate with other practice co-facilitators	I 2 3
Consideration of and responsiveness to others	I 2 3
Commitment to enhancing the interpersonal experience of all class members	I 2 3
Willingness to examine personal values, beliefs, and judgments	I 2 3
Ability to take personal responsibility for learning	I 2 3
Willingness to deal with conflicts appropriately if and when they arise	I 2 3
Ability to be open and responsive to appropriate feedback	I 2 3

General Course Guidelines

Perhaps the best way to learn the intricacies of counselling is to involve yourself in as many ways as possible. This means practicing not only as counsellor but also as client. If you have not been in counselling before, now is an excellent time to consider the option. If you want to know what clients need – become one.

The classroom is an artificial setting. As such, personal issues brought by students for exploration in the process sessions should carry a smaller emotional charge than what you might bring to a genuine session with your professional counsellor. For example, talking about a small conflict at work is typically a good practice theme, whereas your experience as the only survivor of a plane crash is not.

Remember to honor confidentiality as regards your practice sessions. It is a serious ethical breach to discuss session content outside of the session with others who were not involved. Although session content may come up in class, this material will remain confidential to our group. It is very difficult to maintain confidentiality, especially when you hear juicy gossip. It is best to start practicing confidentiality as a skill early in your career, because it requires constant reinforcement. If you are serious about it, others are likely to be as well.

Trust the wisdom of your own resources as you move forward. If you know how to follow your own centre, you will have no trouble. However, none of us is able to be on track all the time, so if you get overwhelmed talk to fellow students or to the instructor. Speak up if something is not working for you. I am especially interested in you bringing forward views, techniques and opinions that are contrary to those presented in class.

And, finally: have fun.

Class Schedule

The class structure involves ten evening sessions and one Saturday session. The Saturday session is an experiential day, an opportunity for students to work on their personal and professional development and to experience a working group context firsthand. The evening sessions are balanced between experiential exercises and academic material. The content for each evening session is listed below.

Session One Introductions and student goals.

Course objectives and assignments.

Teaching as modeling.

Group chairs exercise; group discussion.

Session Two Three core skills (grounding, centering, boundaries).

Group discussions about effective facilitation.

Session Three Group evolution and development (the mandala).

Small group formation. Mirror exercise.

Session Four Stage in self-awareness and group development.

Ball toss exercises.

Session Five Therapeutic statements.

Effective and ineffective statements.

The continuum of practice.

Session Six Sensing and working with behaviors and conflicts.

Mask, shadow, and authentic self.

Session Seven Working with addictions.

Group Presentations.

Session Eight Spirituality and creativity in the group context.

Group Presentations.

Session Nine Working with specific populations.

Group Presentations.

Research paper due.

Session Ten Completing group closure.

Final details and closure.