

Turkish counselor trainees' experiences regarding experiential groups: A qualitative study

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine Turkish counselor trainees' experiences about participating in an experiential training group. The phenomenological research design was used to understand counselor trainees' experiences in experiential group. The 18 undergraduate counseling students (14 female and 4 male) enrolled in a group counseling course were the participants of the study. The data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews after the completion of twelve-week experiential counseling groups. Content analysis was used to analyze the data and according to results, three main categories emerged: a) perceptions, b) contributions and c) problems. Under the perceptions category emotions and metaphors themes emerged. Vocational and personal contributions were two main themes emerged under the contributions category. And under the problems category, two themes emerged as group structure and group process. The findings were discussed in the light of the literature and recommendations for counselor educators and researchers are presented.

Keywords: counselor training; group counseling; experiential group; group leadership; Turkey.

Introduction

The ability to do group work is one of the main competencies of counselor education. It is also one of the common core areas required by the U.S. Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016). Group work is defined as "broad professional practice involving the application of knowledge and skill in group facilitation to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals which may be intrapersonal, interpersonal, or work-related" (Association for Specialist in Group Work, ASGW, 2000, p. 2).

Group leadership training is one of the main concerns in counselor education. In order to provide effective training, standards and specific guidelines have been established by CACREP and ASGW. According to CACREP (2016) standards, potential group leaders should have knowledge about theoretical foundations of group work, therapeutic factors, group process and development, group leadership styles, and ethical standards, acquired through a basic course. Also CACREP standards require a minimum of 10 hours of experiential involvement in which students participate as group members in a small group. Similarly, ASGW (2000) core training standards require counselor trainees to take at least one graduate course in group work that includes theoretical knowledge about types of group work, group development, group process and dynamics, group leadership and also to engage in an experiential group for a minimum of 10 hours (20 hours recommended) as observer, group member and/or group leader.

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As underlined by the standards provided by CACREP and ASGW, both theoretical knowledge and a group experience are essential in effective group leadership training. In order words, there is a general agreement that effective counselor training should include both didactic and experiential components (ASGW, 2000; Barlow, 2004; CACREP, 2016; Furr & Barret, 2000). Theoretical knowledge regarding types of group work, group development, group process and dynamics typically are provided through courses in programs, with group experience elements of training provided through participating in a group itself.

Experiential training groups usually focus on students' personal issues relevant to their group work as well as helping them to learn group process and skills. According to counselor educators, experiential groups are necessary and important in order to develop effective group leadership skills (Fall & Levitov, 2002). The bulk of the literature suggests multiple potential advantages of experiential groups for counselor trainees. For instance, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) proposed that participating in an experiential group may provide emotional learning and insight for students, and usually counselor trainees gain awareness about their strengths and weaknesses (Ieva, Ohrt, Swank & Young, 2009).

Experiential group training provides personal learning to trainees including self-awareness about personal characteristics and awareness of self within the group process through such elements as self-disclosure, confrontation, coping with silence, and an developing an understanding of other cultures, values and experiences (Smith & Davis-Gage, 2008). Being a group member is essential for observing a group leader in action and developing skills such as communicating empathy, confrontation and feedback (Kline, Falbaum, Pope, Hargraves, & Hundley, 1997; Noack, 2002). Moreover being a member helps trainees to understand how their future clients might feel and react during the group process and to transfer their learning to their own leadership efforts (Ieva et al., 2009; Smith & Davis-Gage; 2008). The experience also, in itself, creates awareness of group dynamics and gives opportunity to vicariously learn group leadership skills (Flasch, Bloom & Holladay, 2016; Ieva et al., 2009; Merta & Sission, 1991; Merta, Wolfgang & McNeil, 1993; Stockton & Toth, 1996).

Although there is a consensus about the benefits and efficacy of experiential group training, some questions about experiential groups have still been argued. Empirical investigations revealed that instructor-led groups are used in 39 % of the counseling programs. Of the % 22 programs, counselor educators take an observer role; of the % 19 programs, counselor educators do not lead the group, but receive feedback (Merta et al., 1993). Some researchers have argued that counselor educator involvement in such groups may cause some ethical concerns, such as in regard to dual relationships. In most cases, counselor educators have varied roles such as group leader, observer, instructor, and gatekeeper, and these role combinations can introduce ethical concerns (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2014; Furr & Barret, 2000; Goodrich, 2008; Merta & Sisson, 1991).

Anderson and Price (2001) concluded that 3 % to 29 % of students experience difficulties with ethical problems such as dual relationship and invasion of privacy. Mandatory participation, inappropriate self-disclosure and the violation of confidentiality are other concerns of experiential groups (Merta & Sisson, 1991; Shumaker, Ortiz & Brenninkmeyer, 2011). According to a recent study (Shumaker et al, 2011), lack of skill proficiency (31 %), perceived student violation of confidentiality (28 %), attendance problems (26 %), inappropriate behavior (16 %) and dual relationship dilemma (13 %) were mentioned as the most common problems faced in experiential groups. In another study examining trainees' perceptions regarding experiential group, acquaintance between members was found to have a negative affect during the group process in terms of promoting a decrease in self-disclosure, personal contact outside the group, and discomfort in the group process (Lüleci, 2015).

Group Counseling Training in Turkey

The historical development of counseling in Turkey dates back to the 1950s (Doğan, 2000). Turkey is one of the countries in the world that has been carrying out counselor education at three levels (undergraduate, master's, and doctoral). In 73 of the 174 universities in Turkey (58 public, 15 private) there are 95 counseling programs (Turkish Council of Higher Education Student Selection and Placement Center, 2016). Mainly graduates of counseling undergraduate programs work as mental health providers in Turkey, and since there is no accreditation of counseling programs, the quality of undergraduate counselor training is a very crucial concern in Turkey.

Group work ability is also one of the main counselor competencies in counselor training in Turkey usually gained through group counseling courses in the undergraduate programs. The aim of these courses is to provide basic concepts and skills regarding group counseling, group process, group techniques and interventions, group process and stages of group (Council of Higher Education, 2007). At the undergraduate level, group experience is somewhat limited, with students usually participating in an experiential group that is led by counselor educators. Although there are some differences among counseling programs, counselor trainees usually lead an experiential group under supervision through their masters and doctorate education. There are also only a few studies (Aladağ, Kağnıcı, Cihangir Çankaya, Özeke Kocabaş & Yaka, 2011; Büyükgöze Kavas, 2011; Lüleci, 2015) regarding efficacy of experiential groups in Turkey.

The Purpose of the Study

The studies examining the benefits and limitations of the experiential groups depend on the views of counselor educators. Therefore, it is considered that there is a need for understanding trainees' experiences and perceptions regarding experiential training groups. As aforementioned, since there is no counselor accreditation in Turkey yet, research findings regarding counselor training is considered important to ensure qualified training.

The research findings regarding using experiential groups in counselor training in general point out both the advantages and disadvantages of experiential groups, as previously summarized. From a cultural point of view, whether these advantages and disadvantages are valid in Turkey is the concern of the present study. The limited number of studies already conducted in Turkey provide a point of view; however, with this study it was aimed to get a deeper understanding regarding experiences of Turkish counselor trainees through a phenomenological design. For this purpose, the study sought to answer the following research question: "What are counselor trainees' experiences regarding experiential training groups?"

Method

Design

Phenomenological research design was used in the present study. A phenomenological research study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (or phenomenon) (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Creswell, 1998). The phenomenon examined in the present study was the experiences of counseling students about their experiential group counseling experience.

Research Team

The research team consisted of two female counselor educators. The first author has a doctoral degree in counseling and had implemented experiential groups for four years as a part of a "Group Counseling" course. The second author has a doctoral degree and has almost twenty years of experience in counseling. She has 12 years of experience teaching group counseling courses and leading experiential groups. Both of the authors value group work as a research topic and counseling practice.

Prior to collecting data, the research team discussed their expectations and biases related to experiential groups. These expectations included that despite the disadvantages, experiential groups provide positive experience for counselor trainees and experiential groups are important for educating future group leaders. For maintaining objectivity, the research team continued to discuss assumptions and expectations throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Procedure

At the beginning of the group counseling course, students were divided into four groups (12 students per group). Each group was led by an instructor or research assistant. The instructors who taught the didactic part to a group of students were the group leaders of a different group of students. 75-minute unstructured experiential groups continued for 12 weeks. The data were collected by individual interviews after the completion of counseling groups. The group leaders were asked to provide the names of three group members based on their participation levels; namely high, medium and low. The determined group members were informed about the research and asked to participate in the study. All the students ($n = 18$) volunteered to participate and undertook an individual interview. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes each and were completed in a week by the first author of the study.

Participants

Maximum variation sampling was preferred for the study in order to understand the variations and similarities among group members whose participation levels were different. The participants of the study were 18 undergraduate counseling students enrolled in a group counseling course at a large university located in western Turkey. Of the 18 students, 14 were female and 4 were male. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 24 years. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals included in the study.

Measures

The data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. The main themes of the interview included the features of the group experience, effective and ineffective parts of the group experience, the feelings and metaphors associated with the group experience, the best and worst part of being a group member, and the things that would be changed if the chance was provided.

Reliability and Validity

Both the participants and the data collection instruments were described in as much detail as possible in order to verify external reliability of the study. For the internal validity of the study, consistency was achieved during data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation processes. Maximum variation sampling was used in order to collect data about the group counseling experience phenomena. Moreover, researcher variation was used in order to verify findings of the study. To enhance the external validity of the study, research design, data collection procedure, data collection instruments, data analysis, interpretation of data, and organization of the findings were described in detail.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in the study. First the interviews were transcribed, and a qualitative data set was created. Participants were coded in order to maintain anonymity. The data set was continuously read by the researchers and during these readings a draft coding list was formed by each researcher. By this draft coding list, qualitative data was coded. During draft coding, possible themes were created. The coding process was completed when the researchers came together and discussed their codes, themes and the possible conflicts.

Results

Content analysis results of the study indicated three main categories: a) perceptions, b) contributions and c) problems. The themes and the codes are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories, themes and codes

	Emotions
Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive (n= 16) • Negative (n =3)
	Metaphors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicles (n = 7) • Goods (n = 4) • Nature (n = 6)
	Vocational
Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential learning (n= 13) • Motivation (n = 3) • Transformation of learning (n = 3)
	Personal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness (n = 9) • Realizing different points of view (n =5) • Skill accomplishment (n =16) • Therapeutic factors(n =10) • Increase in social relationships (n=5)
	Group Structure
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquaintanceship (n = 9) • Size/duration/length of group(n = 14) • Involuntary Participation (n = 9)
	Group Process
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problematic member behaviors (n= 9) • Self-disclosure (n = 5) • Confidentiality (n = 7)

Under the *perceptions about the group* category, two main themes emerged; *emotions* and *metaphors*. Mainly positive *emotions* were reported regarding group experience by the students. Curiosity (n = 4), relief (n = 2), wonder (n = 2), happiness, joy, willingness, courage, peace, hope and intimacy were the main emotions mentioned. A student expressed his feelings as:

During the first weeks I was curious since it was something new for me. Later, every week I wondered about each member's sharing. It was actually good for me, it was an encouraging feeling. Although I missed some of the classes, I attended to the group. I was conscientious about it because I was curious both about the group process and other members' sharing. (S 5)

Negative feelings were also mentioned by the members, especially those who had participated less to the groups such as uncertainty, being bored and feeling insensitive. One student expressed her feelings as:

The group cohesion was not built; I didn't think that trust was achieved in the group. This was one of the reasons that I didn't share anything in the group. Everyone was talking about shallow issues, I didn't feeling that everyone trusted each other; therefore I was bored. It was useless. (S 9)

In terms of *metaphors*, the groups were mainly associated with dynamic objects such as vehicles (n = 5) - namely bus, train, ship, boat, car and machines - also with goods - empty house, empty chair, mirror, hanger - and nature - daisy, bush, tree, rain drop and stone. In regard to vehicle metaphors, as a common aspect, the group leaders were defined as the captain and group members as the passengers. Mainly, the group process was pictured as a pleasing journey. The

metaphors used and the feelings mentioned were mainly integrated. For example a student's metaphor was:

We are in a boat in a foggy day. Sometimes we see the shore, sometimes we lost it. The group members are on the boat, the sea is the group process, and the shore is the benefit we get from the group. We see the shore when we open ourselves to get benefit from the group but when the group process slows down, we lose the shore. The sea has lots of unknown. (S 6)

Under the *contributions* category, two main themes emerged, *vocational* and *personal* contributions. Regarding *vocational* contributions, students indicated that by being a member of a group, they had chance to observe the leader's skills, techniques and interventions while leading the group (n = 15), to observe theoretical information about group process through an actual experience (n = 7), to face with different lives, in other words they had the chance to learn through experience. One group member reflected her thoughts as "I think that after the theoretical class to make comparisons about what we have learned in group experience was very useful. Because things we learned in theory were very abstract, superficial and simple" (S 17).

Three group members mentioned that after this experience they felt themselves more motivated, since they had established a more positive attitude towards their profession, had confidence in the effectiveness of the group process and evaluated their competencies. One of the students indicated his thoughts as "Because of our leader's feedbacks to us, pointing out important issues to me and my friends, I had a wish to be an academician, my wish has increased, and I have become more hopeful. I was really impressed with what she had done" (S 11).

Some of the group members mentioned that the group process had provided chance to transfer their learning to other settings, mainly to their internships. They said that they applied some skills that they learned in the group during their internships. One student said that "This semester we had also vocational guidance practices; we were in a group process. I made observation here; I have tried things that I wouldn't do. It really worked a lot" (S 15).

In terms of *personal contributions*, students mentioned that they had become more aware of themselves during the process. One student defined this as "Characteristics I have carried for twenty two years that I have not realized, emerged in the group. When I received feedback about these, I questioned myself. Am I really like this? I got awareness about my personality; a mirror was held to me" (S 7). Through the group experience, students mentioned that they had gained new skills such as empathy, decrease in prejudice, effective listening, self-expression and patience. One student expressed her thoughts as:

I think that I have learned to listen more effectively. As a personality characteristic, I talk too much. Effective listening is as important as to talk, even more important in our profession. I certainly think that catching the details of what people explain increased my empathy. These are all related and required skills for our profession; therefore the group provided too many contributions. (S 10)

As another contribution, realizing different points of views was also underlined by students. One student stated that "I have seen different personality types, different people. When you chose a friend, you chose people who are similar to you but in the groups since the members were not chosen by us, I had the chance to get acquainted with different people" (S 1). It was also found that some of the students benefited from the group by increasing their social relationships. One student mentioned this as "I have had a closer relationship with my classmates. There were people I didn't talk to, but our communication has increased. We are closer now" (S 18).

Therapeutic factors such as universality, being understood, being not alone expected in the groups were also experienced by the group members. One student expressed her thoughts as "People always think that the problems are only held by them. Seeing that other people also have similar problems, helps to realize that s/he is not alone, not different, s/he is as normal and simple as the others" (S 3).

Under the *problems* category, two themes emerged as *group structure* and *group process*. Students mentioned problems regarding group structure under three headings; a) acquaintanceship (n = 9); b) size, duration and length of the group (n = 14); c) involuntary participation (n = 9). In terms of acquaintanceship, since the groups were set up among classmates, some students mentioned that being in a group with their classmates was a problem, especially with close friends. One student indicated her discomfort as:

When you are in the group with a close friend, you can't talk about things that s/he is not talking. In the group I was with my close friend. It was the infective aspect of the group for me. For example I couldn't talk about the issues that she didn't know or I didn't want her to hear. (S 8)

In terms of size, since there were 12-14 members in the groups, the groups were found to be crowded by some students. In terms of duration of the group, some students mentioned that 75 to 90 minutes was not enough, and, in terms of length, since the groups lasted a semester long, the time was found to be limited and was expected to be longer. One student expressed her thoughts as:

The length of group was very short. It was not enough for everyone to talk. Maybe the number of members should be less. There were holidays, group leaders' conferences, actually these were not so many, but still there were not enough sessions for each member. One session is gone with getting acquainted, the other with ending, saying goodbyes. Whether the number of members is too many or the time is limited. (S 16).

Participation in the groups as a member was mandated in the course; it was a requirement. Therefore, each student had to be a group member. This condition was mentioned as a problem by some of the students. One student expressed her discomfort as "Some of the members did not want to attend to the group. This should be known. The participation is mandated. Actually in counseling, being voluntary is the main issue; however, in group counseling this was neglected" (S 6).

The problems regarding *group process* were expressed as facing problematic member behaviors (n = 9), self-disclosure (n = 5), and anxiety about confidentiality (n = 7). Students mentioned that there were both very silent and overly dominant group members who effected their active participation. One student mentioned that "For example everybody was not providing feedback, there were many silent members. I was also not very active, but I tried not to be silent" (S 17). Students also mentioned that talking about their issues in front of a group of people was not easy for them. One student expressed her experience as "The worst part of the group was to talk about your problems in the group; everyone sees your weak parts (S 8)."

In terms of confidentiality, since the group members were also classmates, a number of students were not comfortable about confidentiality. One student mentioned this as "We are in the school environment, I am in this group, and my best friend is in the other. The thoughts such as 'will she tell me?', 'will he tell to his best friend' created questions regarding confidentiality in our minds" (S 4).

Finally, during the interviews, students were asked about what they would do differently or what they would expect to be changed if another chance was given to them. The problems mentioned under this theme were expressed by the students. Students said that they would expect changes in group formation and, although it was a hard experience, they would talk more about their personal issues, increase their self-disclosure.

Discussion and Implications

In the present study it was aimed to get a deeper understanding regarding experiences of Turkish counselor trainees regarding experiential groups. The results of the study provided three main categories: a) perceptions, b) contributions and c) problems. In terms of perceptions, counselor trainees were found to have positive emotions about the group experience and the group process was pictured as a pleasing journey. In Anderson and Price's study (2001), the

experiential group was also perceived as a beneficial experience by 77 % and 97 % of students. It seems evident that most of the trainees were pleased with the experiential group and many perceived the experiential group as a positive and beneficial experience.

In terms of contributions, both personal and vocational contributions were expressed. Regarding vocational contributions, counselor trainees indicated that by being a member of a group, they had chance to observe the leader's skills, techniques and interventions. The findings were consisted with the findings of the previous studies (Flasch, Bloom & Holladay, 2016; Ohrt, Prochenko, Stulmaker, Huffman, Fernando & Swan, 2014; Smaby, Maddux, Torres-Rivera and Zimmick, 1999; Stockton & Toth, 1996) that the group experience provided opportunity to vicariously learn group leadership skills. In Smith and Davis-Gage's (2008) study, observing a group leader for understanding the leadership role, especially application of counseling techniques was mentioned as being one of the advantages of the experiential group. This finding also supports the ASGW's (2000) standards that a minimum of 10 hours is recommended as an observer, group member and/or group leader in an experiential group. Findings of the present study were also supported by the few studies conducted in Turkey (Aladağ et al., 2011; Büyükgöze Kavas, 2011; Lüleci, 2015). As parallel to Ieva et al.'s (2009) findings, participating in the group motivated counselor trainees and they had gained more positive attitudes towards their profession, and had confidence in effectiveness of the group process. Moreover, some of the group members mentioned that group process had provided chance to transfer their learning to other settings mainly to their internships.

As Yalom and Leszcz (2005) proposed participating in the experiential group provided personal insights for counselor trainees. Several trainees mentioned that they had become more aware of themselves during the process; gained awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. They also gained new skills such as empathy, decrease in prejudice, effective listening, self-expression and patience realizing different points of views. These findings were consistent with the literature (Aladağ, et al. 2011; Büyükgöze Kavas, 2011; Kline et al., 1997; Ieva et al., 2009; Lüleci, 2015; Noack, 2002; Smith and Davis-Gage, 2008). Besides self-awareness, counselor trainees mentioned that they had enhanced their interpersonal relationships with others as also found in Ieva et al.'s (2009) study. As the other finding, the therapeutic factors such as universality, being understood, being not alone expected in the groups were also experienced by the group members. These therapeutic factors are parallel with the Yalom and Leszcz's conceptualization of therapeutic factors in group process. Similarly, in Smith and Davis-Gage's (2008) study it was found useful to experience therapeutic factors such as universality.

Problems regarding group structure and group process were also mentioned in the present study. Group structure related problems were expressed as acquaintanceship, size, duration and length of the group and involuntary participation. According to the findings, being in a group with classmates or close friends effected counselor trainees negatively. In another study (Lüleci, 2015) that examined the trainees' perceptions of experiential group in Turkey, the same finding was found. In that study acquaintance between members was found to have negative affect on experiential group process. Students mentioned that acquaintanceship caused some problems such as decrease in self-disclosure, personal contact outside the group, and discomfort in group process. In terms of group structure related problems, it can be said that the problems mentioned by the counselor trainees were related to group composition. The trainees complained about size, duration and length of the groups. Although ideal group size differs based on many dimensions such as the purpose of the group, age of the members, physical setting; commonly for adolescents and adults 8-12 members is expressed as the ideal number (Vander Kolk, 1985; Yalom, 1995). As a disadvantage of large group member size, it is underlined that members do not have enough time to talk about their personal issues (Jacobs, Mason & Harvill, 1998; Yalom, 1995) as mentioned by the counselor trainees in the present study. In terms of length, as Corey and Corey (2002) and Trotzer (1989) pointed out, the environment the groups are conducted effect the length of the groups. Commonly in universities groups run up to 15

weeks, a length of the semester. Regarding duration, for university students 90 minutes to 2 hours weekly sessions are preferable (Corey & Corey, 2002). Although the length and the duration of the groups in the present were ideal, the counselor trainees might have experienced discomfort due to the size of the groups.

The problems regarding group process was expressed as facing problematic member behaviors, self-disclosure and anxiety about confidentiality. Mandatory participation, inappropriate self-disclosure and violation of confidentiality are listed as the limitations of the experiential groups (Merta & Sisson, 1991; Shumaker et al., 2011) and in the present study these limitations were observed. Interestingly, different from the existing literature that experiential groups lead by educators may cause problems as dual relationships (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2014; Furr & Barret, 2000; Goodrich, 2008; Merta & Sisson, 1991), in the present study, dual relationship issue was not mentioned by the trainees although the groups were led by the counselor educators. The main reason might be that the instructors who are responsible for the didactic and experiential part of the course were different people. Consequently, even the instructor has an evaluative role in some other courses; students were not evaluated by their group leaders for the group counseling course.

Both advantages and disadvantages of using experiential groups in counselor education were expressed by the counselor trainees. The findings were mainly parallel with the existing literature. At this point the main question seems to be "which part of the balance is heavier? Advantages or disadvantages?". When the findings of the present study are considered as a whole, advantage part of the balance seems to be heavier. According to the results, and on balance, counselor trainees expressed positive emotions about the group experience; had chance to observe the leader's skills, techniques and interventions; had gain more positive attitude towards their profession; had confidence in effectiveness of the group process; gained awareness of their strengths and weaknesses; gained new skills and enhanced their interpersonal relationships.

The main problems mentioned in the present study were mainly related with group composition which is believed that can be fixed during training. For example, although it was not reported as a problem by students, to eliminate the potential ethical problems, experiential training groups may be led by group leaders who are not in the faculty. In the situations where it is not possible, experiential groups might be more structured and students' participation can be limited. For this purpose, focusing here-and-now experiences and role-playing activities could be used (Pierce & Baldwin, 1990). Alternative training models can be used to eliminate the disadvantages of experiential group training. For example, Furr and Barret (2000) suggested a model including both didactic and experiential components. In this model, instructor are only responsible for didactic part of the course and experiential group are utilized by another professional. Toth, Stockton and Erwin (1998) proposed a skill-based training model in which the students are not required to disclose their personal information. This model includes didactic component, role-play component, observing through videotapes and practicing leadership in a small structured group. Another proposed model, Simulated Group Counseling Model (Romano, 1998), depends on role-play and students have a chance to experience group membership and leadership. Smaby et al. (1999) also proposed a systematic model to teach group counseling skills to trainees. This model emphasized role-playing, modeling, leadership practice and feedback. In summary, several different training models have been proposed to eliminate the disadvantages of experiential training but more research is needed in order to examine the effectiveness, advantages and disadvantages of different training models in developing group work competencies.

Consequently, the findings of the present study provided deeper information regarding experiential groups in counselor training. In terms of future studies, the models summarized above could be tested in various counselor training programs in order to eliminate mentioned disadvantages of the experiential groups. The present study has also its own limitations.

Although in depth counselor trainees' experiences were explored regarding experiential groups, the results are not transferable to other counselor trainees. As the other limitation, the data of the present study was collected from only one counseling training program.

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