EFFECTS OF AN ENCOUNTER GROUP FOR COUNSELORS-IN-TRAINING ON DEVELOPMENT OF PERSON-CENTERED CORE CONDITIONS

Jeffrey H. D. Cornelius-White & Chris L. Carver
Missouri State University, USA

Abstract: Central to the success of person-centered counseling is the fostering of empathy, authenticity and acceptance in counselors-in-training. The researchers assessed the development of these core conditions in counselors-in-training who participated in a 16-week encounter group facilitated by the first author. Quantitative and qualitative measures were employed from participant, researcher, and facilitator perspectives. Participants consisted of two groups of 15 each (*N*=30). Results showed large self-perceived development on self-report quantitative measures. Observer ratings on students' journals, facilitator's ratings on a measure of therapeutic dispositions, and correlations between the measures provide additional information. The manuscript ends with a brief discussion of limitations and implications for research.

Key words: Acceptance, Authenticity, Core conditions, Counselors-in-training, Empathy, Encounter group, Person-centered

INTRODUCTION

Since person-centered training began, democratic discussions, empathic teaching, and trainee-centered supervision have been centerpieces of training (Rogers, 1951). Over time the encounter group (or Training/T-groups) became more articulated and frequent, not just in the training of person-centered therapists, but also in the training of counselors of various persuasions, teachers, managers, and other professionals where human relations plays a large role (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Studies describing encounter groups in the training of counselors or psychotherapists are surprisingly few

Address: Professor Jeffrey Cornelius-White, Missouri State University, 901 S. National Avenue, Springfield MO, 65897, USA. E-mail: jcornelius-white@missouristate.edu

in number and are not largely focused on a counselor's presence, or core condition development. Research on the development of core conditions in training programs in general offer another vantage point (e.g., Carkhuff, 1969, 1973; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) and on encounter groups with other groups (e.g., Motschnig, 2008), but for space considerations, the review of the literature will be very brief.

Classic research on encounter groups has largely been restricted to Q-sort or other qualitative methods, often from participants' perspectives (e.g., Rogers, 1970). Barrett-Lennard (2005) creator of the seminal Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventories more recently developed a measure of community aiming for a broader sense of relationship beyond that perceived as being between individuals, dyadic, or family relationships. In his pilot study using the Community Questionnaire he found that participants developed a sense of community with "caring and cohesiveness" being amongst the most fostered sense of community and "use of group resources" being among the least. Rogers discussed how reaction journals were used in some evaluations of person-centered groups, such as in the peace process in South Africa, to show both how and what learning occurred (Rogers & Russel, 2002, p. 226). Content analysis of journals provides a static, removed source of information from the experience itself, but likewise provides reflective or more personalized accounts of participants' inner experiences and how those experiences relate to their lives and development outside of the group experiences. Motschnig (e.g., 2008) has used retrospective views asking encounter participants to consider how much they have improved or deteriorated along the core dimensions upon conclusion of an encounter group. She has found that participants almost unanimo usly see encounter as having helped them develop core attitudes and skills at least to moderate perceived levels. Likewise, students consistently rate encounter groups as more important to their learning than traditional structured elements in person or online components.

One of the most consistent findings in classic studies on training person-centered core conditions (e.g., Carkhuff, 1969, 1973; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) was that trainees develop in a small but clear direct relationship to the skill level of their trainer. This early training research often used the Carkhuff scales and showed moderate change from observer perspectives. Counselor educators who demonstrate higher levels of empathy, warmth, and genuineness help facilitate these qualities to emerge in counselors-in-training. This finding has been replicated in studies on preschool/-kindergarten through higher education studies on teaching a wide variety of subjects. In a meta-analysis of over 100 studies published from 1940-2000, Cornelius-White (2007) showed that students develop social-emotional-behavioral skills better in the context of high teacher empathy, warmth, and genuineness.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The authors conducted this study in order to provide a more recent investigation of a classic training modality with current trainees. The intent was to use quantitative and qualitative methodologies, periodic, reflective reactions and longer-term retrospective measures, and incorporate participants' self-report, observer's content analysis and ratings, and facilitator's disposition ratings to provide a diverse array of viewpoints and provide a broad spectrum assessment of how encounter groups foster the development of empathy, unconditional positive regard and authenticity. The results of this study are a part of a larger series exploring the process and outcomes of person-centered encounter groups conducted by the facilitator, which are under continuing data collection or analysis. These include the effects of encounter groups on personal problem resolution, professional goal attainment, acquisition of emotional intelligence, and unique perceptions by African-American participants (Cornelius-White, 2011; Gilliam, 2011). The specific research questions of this particular study are:

1. To what extent do counselors-in-training endorse having improved their empathic, warm, and authentic behaviors?

2. To what extent does observer review of journals show frequency of participant empathy, warmth, or authenticity?

3. To what extent do participant journals demonstrate maturity in empathy, warmth, and authenticity?

4. To what extent do counselors-in-training attain developed dispositions of core conditions from a facilitator's perspective?

5. To what extent do the measures used in this study- the student's ratings of growth, the facilitator's evaluation of dispositions, the observer ratings of frequency and maturity in journals- measure similar or different constructs?

METHODS

Procedures

The groups were the primary focus of a class called "Orientation to Personal and Professional Development" a class taken early in the program (usually first semester). It is often times the first "process-oriented" class in a student's curriculum and is taken with other, more "content" driven courses (e.g., Tests and Measures or Professional Ethics). Students typically take this course prior to direct instruction and

practice on facilitation skills. In addition to the encounter component of the course, students had suggested readings, including short, generic guidelines for participating in groups (Farmer, 2010), Rogers's "Can I be a facilitative person in groups?" (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. 339-357), *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), and Johnson (2006) *Reaching Out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self-Actualization*. As a required component of the group, students wrote a weekly reaction log of their experiences and an agenda of things they wanted to address or work on in the group. These weekly logs and agendas ranged from 1 to 5 pages long, most of which were about 2 pages. They also wrote short essays (2-5 pages each) at midpoint and final that addressed their broader perceptions of their development. These writings were written for review by the instructor and students only as an aid to further processing of the group, and not shared with other group members. Additionally, though results are not presented in this study, the student participants identified idiosyncratic problems to work on throughout the term using the Simplified Personal Questionnaire technique (Elliott, Mack, & Shapiro, 1999). Though invited to make attempts in their essays, there was no requirement to link readings, logs, agendas, personal goals/problems, essays, or group participation in any particular way. Students varied in how much they integrated or referenced these different components, but generally they focused on their own reactions to the group or their own struggles and resolutions in their personal and professional life.

The group was conducted in a classical person-centered (e.g., nondirective) style. The facilitator held the intention to "trust the process" through being empathic, unconditional, and genuine. This involved frequent empathic following statements, particularly in the first sessions or in situations where someone was processing or clarifying something with a deep level of emotion, meaning, or confusion (Carkhuff, 1973; Sachse & Elliott, 2002), and transparent self-disclosures. A previous published account of the facilitator's style (Cornelius-White, 2003) supervised by Barbara Brodley showed very high rates of nondirective attitude and behavior and similar speech frequency percentages to Rogers' own demonstration videos within the context of individual psychotherapy. The facilitator was trained by and/or participated in multiple groups with other nondirective facilitators (e.g., Nat Raskin, Barbara Brodley, Jerold Bozarth, Kathy Moon). Previous assessments have shown that the instructor's classroom behavior is highly consistent with the learner-centered model (e.g., Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010; McCombs, 2004) on the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices and with Friendly/Understanding Cooperative style on the Questionnaire for Teacher Interaction, particularly in experiential settings (e.g., Wubbels & Levy, 1993) and Emotionally Intelligent style on the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal (Bradberry & Greaves, 2010) within an

encounter group context. Students were generally not asked questions or given interpretations, immediacy proposals, or suggestions about how to interact by the instructor, except as spontaneously occurred once or twice within a group, or when requested by a particular participant (e.g., Can you tell me what you would do? How do others feel right now about what I said?). However, many participants made these and other "interventions" as so inclined.

The data collection involved using a random number generator online (e.g., http://stattrek.com/Tables/Random.aspx) to determine which 60 of the approximately 450 logs/agendas would be utilized for content analysis. Additionally, all final essays were included, providing 90 total documents for content analysis. Midpoint and final change in Therapeutic Attitudes were also included. Upon completion of the group, the facilitator did a rating using four relevant dimensions of the Assessment of Dispositions for Counselor Education Students Scale. By waiting till after the group's completion, the facilitator reduced the likelihood that evaluative intent would interfere with nondirective facilitation, and had the entire group experience upon which to draw a broad rating. The researchers conducted data entry and statistical calculations using Excel and SPSS.

Participants

There were 15 persons in each of two encounter groups for a total of 30 participants, not including the facilitator, a European-American male, age 38 (first author). The participants included three males in each group for a total of six men, or 17% male. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 60, with a median age of 28. The first group had 10 European-Americans, including a Greek national, and five persons of color including African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. The second group was comprised of all European-Americans. All participants consented to participate in the group and the study.

Measures

Three measures assessed the development and level of empathy, unconditional positive regard and authenticity of the participants. The first is a conscious, reflective self-report of growth or deterioration from the participants. The second is a content analysis of a free-response self-report in terms of frequency and maturity of core conditions in written materials, conducted by a non-participant observer (second author). The facilitator's reflective assessment of the core conditions in the participants is the third measure. In this way, there is a participant, observer, and

facilitator/instructor rating, reflecting periodic and retrospective views.

Therapeutic Attitude Improvement or Deterioration Scale. The first measure was created and used in multiple studies by Motschnig (2008) and colleagues at the Research Lab for educational technologies at the University of Vienna evaluating encounter groups in higher educational settings in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The measure includes nine items, forming three scales with three items each (empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity). It asks students to rate from -4 to +4 how much they have improved or deteriorated on each item, such as "I don't hide behind a mask" (authenticity item), "I can accept others even if I do not share their view" (unconditional positive regard item) or "I'm often responsive to others and they feel understood" (empathy item). Figl (2008) conducted reliability and factor analysis on items of the scale and found three factors and good reliability (alpha > .80) though the scales did inter-correlate significantly.

Assessment of Dispositions of Counselor Education Students. Using four dimensions most related to the three core conditions from a six dimension scale created by Sesser, Ferris, Cowles, and Forth (2006), the facilitator/instructor evaluated the attained dispositional development of each student upon completion of the group. Three items on each dimension: Unconditional Positive Regard, Compassion & Empathy, and Modeling (of Congruent Behavior), were assessed. The fourth was an empathy-relate item called Facilitative. The items are scored on a five point Likert Scale with anchors 1-Rejects, 2 Indifferent, 3 Emerging, 4 Accepts, 5 Embraces. Hence a score of 15 on one dimension is characterized by a full embracement, integration, or demonstration of that disposition while a score of 12 represents an acceptance of the disposition, and a score of 9 represents an emergence of the disposition. Each of the three items per dimension are defined by the facilitator's impressions of each student's beliefs about people, attitude towards others, and behaviors towards others. The dispositions draw on the person-centered/humanistic works of Rogers, Carkhuff, Patterson, and Myrick. Sample items include "genuinely appreciates others' points of view" (unconditional positive regard item) or "Eagerly encourages others to explore feelings and thoughts, reflects back, and seeks confirmation of understanding" (empathy and compassion item).

Content Analysis Using Modified Classic Carkhuff (1973) Scales. All sentences, or units of thought, within the journals were categorized as reflecting an attempt at unconditional positive regard, empathy, or authenticity. This comprised a frequency score, that is how frequently did participants write about others, themselves, or the regarding attitude between persons. Secondly, each journal was holistically evaluated along a three point scale. A level one was characterized by immaturity and disparate statements that detract from coherence roughly

equivalent to a 1 or 2 level response on the Carkhuff scales. Level two was characterized by a minimally facilitative expression, or a 3 on the Carkhuff scales. Level three was characterized by a mature or growing expression, showing integration, elaboration, or poignancy roughly equivalent to a 4 or 5 on the Carkhuff scales. The authors tested this scale for agreement independently and then through discussion for consensus until a high level of agreement (>90%) was reached on journals not included in the sample. Once agreement was reached, journals were selected and reviewed only by the observer (second author). The observer then categorized all documents using frequency and maturity scales. The observer's only window into the group's development was through analysis of the journals, creating a different sample than the inner view from students themselves, or the participant-observer view from the facilitator.

The majority of journals reviewed were one page in length. Each statement in each journal was coded initially as empathic, regarding, or authentic; irrelevant comments that could not be classified in one of those categories were omitted. Then all comments in each sample item were examined as a group and coded based on the Carkhuff variant for maturation of the three core attitudes developed for this study.

RESULTS

This study explored three different ways of assessing maturation of core facilitative attitudes, skills and dispositions of empathy, respect and authenticity. These involved self-report, observer ratings of journals, and facilitator ratings.

Student Self-Report

The first way to examine whether the encounter group helped participants develop core therapeutic skills and attitudes was to ask students directly how much they felt they had improved or deteriorated from beginning to midpoint and midpoint to conclusion on nine questions. Each of the three core conditions corresponded with three questions. These items do not presuppose any absolute starting place and are subjective to the student's own views. In other words, one person may start very immature while another starts mature. Participants are asked to rate their development in relation to their own subjective starting place. Hence, high levels of perceived growth may not be indicative of high levels of maturity in these items, as the starting points are relative to each participant. Table 1 presents descriptive data for

Table 1. Participants' self-reported perceived growth in core conditions at week 8 of 16 weeks

Item or Area	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
As I Really Am A1	30	.00	4.00	2.37	1.07
Regard others U1	30	1.00	4.00	2.87	.937
Point of view E1	30	1.00	4.00	2.90	.85
Accept Differences U2	30	.00	4.00	2.67	1.12
Don't hide w/maskA2	30	.00	4.00	1.90	1.19
Accept othersU3	30	1.00	4.00	3.13	.82
Position of othersE2	30	.00	4.00	2.57	1.19
Transparent A3	30	-1.00	4.00	2.07	1.44
Responsive E3	30	.00	4.00	1.90	1.27
SelfReport Empathy	30	.67	4.00	2.46	.94
SelfReport UPR	30	1.33	4.00	2.89	.77
SelfReport Authenticity	30	.33	4.00	2.11	1.08

the 30 participants according to each question and the core conditions at the midpoint.

Table 2 does the same for participants' perceived growth since the midpoint.

Table 2. Participants' self-reported perceived growth in core conditions between weeks 9 and 16

Item or Area	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
As I Really Am A1	29	.00	4.00	2.69	1.17
Regard others U1	29	1.00	4.00	3.07	.88
Point of view E1	29	.00	4.00	2.86	1.03
Accept Differences U2	29	.00	4.00	3.00	1.13
Don't hide maskA2	29	-3.00	4.00	2.14	1.81
Accept othersU3	29	.00	4.00	2.83	1.17
Position of othersE2	29	-1.00	4.00	2.79	1.18
Transparent A3	29	-1.00	4.00	2.17	1.34
Responsive E3	29	.00	4.00	2.45	1.06
SelfReportEmpathy	29	.33	4.00	2.70	.91
SelfReportUPR	29	.67	4.00	2.97	.94
SelfReport Authenticity	29	-.67	4.00	2.33	1.28

Table 3 presents total combined scores from both midpoint and final self-reports grouped according to the three core areas.

In terms of self-report, all 30 students reported improvements on the three core conditions, but not on all nine items. As seen in all three tables, average improvements were substantial on each of the nine items and three conditions at both midterm and final and in the combined results.

Table 3. Participants' self-reported perceived growth in core conditions total

Core Area	*N*	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*
Empathy Change	29	5.00	23.00	15.66	4.86
Unconditional Positive Regard Change	29	7.00	24.00	17.66	4.79
Authenticity Change	29	.00	20.00	13.48	5.65

Facilitator Rating

Table 4 shows descriptive data for these final ratings of dispositional development from the facilitator. On average students fall just above the "Accepts" point on the maturation scale. The specific dimensions range between the "Emerging" phase to the "Embraces" phase.

In contrast to the student data that asks for subjective evaluation of one's self in relation to one's view of one's self, the facilitator rating is in relation to an ideal and consistent maturation point. Likewise, the facilitator rating does not attempt to measure change in development, simply development upon conclusion of the group.

Table 4. Attained core condition development from facilitator's perspective

Core Area	*N*	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*
Unconditional Positive Regard	30	8.00	15.00	13.07	1.53
Empathy and Compassion	30	11.00	15.00	13.00	1.11
Modeling Congruence	30	9.00	15.00	12.70	1.53
Facilitative	30	9.00	15.00	12.67	1.52

Observer Review of Journals

The third perspective to describe and evaluate core condition development involved a co-researcher who did not participate in the group and therefore had no prior knowledge about the group's functioning or in nearly all cases any knowledge of the students and only utilized written materials. Two content analysis components rated by the second author according to the frequency of statements in each of the three core conditions as well as maturation for the entire journal or essay. In comparing statements per journal, empathic ($M = 4.34$) nor unconditionally regarding statements ($M = 2.38$) were as common as authentic statements ($M = 20.13$). This is to be expected given that the journals are written by individuals reflecting upon their own experience and growth and understanding of attitude towards others are largely done in relation to the journaling of their journey of authenticity. Likewise, maturity

of authenticity statements is more visible than in the other two conditions. For authenticity, the average maturity was 2.38 on the 3.0 scale, where empathy was 1.89 and unconditional positive regard was 1.93. In other words, student's statements within their journals on average did not reach the minimally facilitative threshold of 2.0 in empathy or unconditional positive regard, but exceeded that threshold in authenticity.

Table 5 provides examples of level 1, level 2, and level 3 responses in authenticity to help illustrate concrete examples of how statements were scored as less or more mature and give the reader more of a "feel" for the qualitative data.

Table 5. Examples of statement maturity

Maturity Level	Authentic Statement Examples (with explanation for categorizations)
1	How can she be such a jerk? (Simple dis-owned perception of student's feelings, here frustration perhaps)
2	I am finding it very challenging to change. (Simple statement that is owned, a minimally facilitative expression).
3	I think confrontation is difficult for me because I tend to be a people-pleaser. The moment where I want to speak up to someone is the moment that I feel I am going to lose any friendship that was previously formed. (Changing, growing, or poignant expression. Elaboration or integration of feelings, experiences, or actions)

Researchers ran paired sample t-tests to determine if frequency or maturation levels on the three core conditions as measured by observer increased from an average of random sampling of two early journals in comparison with all final journals. Tests showed no significant differences in frequency or maturity for unconditional positive regard statements and no significant difference in maturity of empathic statements. However, for authenticity, both frequency, $t(29) = 2.708$, $p < .011$, and maturity, $t(29) = 3.434$, $p < .002$, significantly and substantially increased. Also, frequency, but not maturity of empathy statements actually significantly decreased from early journals to final, $t(29) = -4.207$, $p < .0002$. One interpretation is that frequency of empathic statements declined as students turned their focus inwards. It is also important to note that range restriction in both frequency and maturity for both empathy and unconditional positive regard may have been factors. Likewise, while the change in frequency of empathic statements in the journals decreased at final, the absolute change in mean is quite small. Early journals average 5.37 empathic statements per journal while the final had 2.30 empathic statements. This is in contrast to the change from 17.48 authentic statements to 25.43 authentic statements.

Relationship between the Methods of Description and Evaluation

Correlations show that for the most part the three methods are measuring different constructs. Students are evaluating their own perceived growth or change in their self-report ratings, facilitator is measuring the outward markers of achieved development (not growth or change), and the observer is rating only written products largely focused on participants' own process in terms of the quantity and quality of focus on core conditions. However, a few correlations are significant ($p < .05$) and a few appear to approach significance ($p < .10$). Given the small sample size of 30 participants, effect sizes had to be in the upper medium to large range to show as significant ($r > .37$).

Table 6. Correlations between empathy measures

		Journal Empathy Frequency Average	Observer Empathy Rating Average	Self-Report Empathy Change	Attained Empathy & Compassion	Attained Facilitative Empathy
Journal Empathy	r	1	.074	.102	.334	.328
Frequency	p		.699	.599	.071	.077
(Observer Rated)	N	30	30	29	30	30
Journal Empathy	r	.074	1	.070	.030	-.007
Maturity	p	.699		.718	.875	.969
(Observer Rated)	N	30	30	29	30	30
Self-Report Empathy	r	.102	.070	1	.129	.371*
Change	p	.599	.718		.506	.048
	N	29	29	29	29	29
Attained Empathy &	r	.334	.030	.129	1	.674**
Compassion	p	.071	.875	.506		.000
(Facilitator Rated)	N	30	30	29	30	30
Attained Facilitative	r	.328	-.007	.371*	.674**	1
Empathy	p	.077	.969	.048	.000	
(Facilitator Rated)	N	30	30	29	30	30

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 6 shows relationship between averages on empathy dimensions. Correlations show that facilitative empathy significantly correlated ($p < .05$) with self-reported change in empathy, while facilitator rated empathy significantly correlated with empathy and compassion ($p < .001$). Attained Empathy and Compassion was related to frequency of empathic statements in journals at a level approaching significance ($p < .10$).

Table 7 shows associations between scores on positive regard measures. Correlations show that facilitator rated UPR significantly correlated with journal statement frequency ($p < .05$), while maturity of UPR in journals significantly correlated with journal statement frequency ($p = .001$).

Table 7. Correlations between unconditional positive regard measures

		Journal UPR Frequency Average	Observer UPR Rating Average	Self-Report UPR Change	Attained UPR
Journal UPR Frequency	*r*	1	.556**	-.034	.362*
(Observer Rated)	*p*		.001	.861	.049
	N	30	30	29	30
Journal UPR Maturity	*r*	.556**	1	.045	.146
(Observer Rated)	*p*	.001		.818	.442
	N	30	30	29	30
Self-Report UPR	*r*	-.034	.045	1	.200
Change	*p*	.861	.818		.298
	N	29	29	29	29
Attained UPR	*r*	.362*	.146	.200	1
(Facilitator Rated)	*p*	.049	.442	.298	
	N	30	30	29	30

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 8 shows associations between averages on authenticity measures. Correlations show that the frequency of authenticity statements in journals significantly correlated with maturity of authenticity statements in journals ($p < .05$) and attained modeling of congruence as assessed by the facilitator. Self-reported change in authenticity significantly correlated with maturity of authenticity in journals ($p < .05$) and approached significance in correlating with attained modeling of congruence as assessed by the facilitator ($p < .10$).

Table 8. Correlations between authenticity measures

		Journal Authenticity Frequency	Observer Authenticity Maturity	Self-Report Authenticity Change	Attained Modeling of Congruence
Journal Authenticity	*r*	1	.434*	-.048	.374*
Frequency	*p*		.016	.803	.042
(Observer Rated)	*N*	30	30	29	30
Journal Authenticity	*r*	.434*	1	.445*	.360
Maturity	*p*	.016		.016	.051
(Observer Rated)	*N*	30	30	29	30
Self-Report	*r*	-.048	.445*	1	.320
Authenticity Change	*p*	.803	.016		.090
	N	29	29	29	29
Attained Modeling	*r*	.374*	.360	.320	1
of Congruence	*p*	.042	.051	.090	
(Facilitator Rated)	*N*	30	30	29	30

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to address four questions related to the development and obtained maturity of core conditions in counselors-in-training through a person-centered encounter group. The discussion is organized along these questions.

1. To what extent do counselors-in-training endorse having improved their empathic, warm, and authentic behaviors?

Participants uniformly report positive development with regards to all three core conditions at both midpoint and final evaluation. No participants reported deterioration. Though research on weekly progress of personal and professional goals shows a dose dependent effect with a negatively accelerated curve (Cornelius-White, 2011) similar to individual therapy research whereby more change is seen in the first weeks than in later weeks (Barkham et al., 1996), this pattern is not apparent with regards to participants' perceived development in therapeutic attitudes. Participants report developing with regards to the three attitudes at a similar pace in the first and second half of the encounter group.

2. To what extent does observer review of journals show frequency of participant empathy, warmth, or authenticity?

Participants make statements that reflect all three core conditions in journals about their experience in the encounter group, but the journals are primarily focused on development of authenticity. Likewise, statements of authenticity frequency in journals increased significantly and substantially, but did not change regarding unconditional positive regard statements. Statements of empathy in the journal decreased significantly but not substantially by final journals. Students appear to focus more inward over time in their journals.

3. To what extent do participant journals demonstrate maturity in empathy, warmth, and authenticity?

Participants increased significantly their maturity in authenticity statements within the journals. Participants did not change significantly with regards to the maturity of their statements in their journals with regards to empathy or unconditional positive regard. Given range restriction and the apparent focus in the journals on authenticity concerns, it was not likely to observe changes in empathic and unconditional positive regard statement maturity.

4. To what extent do counselors-in-training attain developed dispositions of core conditions from a facilitator's perspective?

Counselors-in-training appear to obtain acceptable levels of empathic, authentic and unconditional dispositions according to average facilitator ratings. Students' scores varied between emerging, accepting, and embracing ranges. No

students scored in the indifferent or rejecting ranges, signifying that from the facilitator's perspectives all students showed the potential to develop acceptable levels of core therapeutic dispositions.

5. To what extent do the measures used in this study- the student's ratings of growth, the facilitator's evaluation of dispositions, the observer ratings of frequency and maturity in journals- measure similar or different constructs?

The measures showed correlations at levels expectable given the differences in perspective and focus. Participants' self-report demonstrated their perceived change in skills through the group process. Observer ratings measured participants' frequency and maturity of statements in their personal journals, not in the group process directly. Facilitator ratings measured obtained dispositions, not skills, not change, and not frequency or maturity in written statements. In other words, the measures were of different elements of the core conditions and came from different samples of experience and different perspectives of raters. Likewise, by having multiple perspectives, a holistic conceptualization of the attitudes together, in a meta-condition such as presence or a way-of-being, is highlighted by not over-relying on any one measure of any individual attitude.

Nevertheless, some correlations were significant or approached significance indicating a medium to large effect size ($r = .30$ to $r = .60$) for all three core conditions. Authenticity measures showed the largest number and extent of correlations. No measures showed very large correlations ($r > .60$) except interrelationship of the two empathy dispositions assessed by the facilitator. Therefore, the constructs in the different measures are clearly related but distinct.

Limitations

This study aimed to describe using multi-method, multi-perspective, periodic and longer-term reflective measures of the development of core conditions in students participating in a classical person-centered encounter group. Each of the methods presents limitations, but together they provide multiple windows into how and to what extent these attitudes and skills develop. Self-report retrospective measures are subjective. Perceived growth from one participant has no definite relationship to the perceived growth of a different participant. The use of reaction papers are significantly removed from the experience of the encounter group and primarily provided a window into authenticity as statements categorized as related to empathy and unconditional positive regard were relatively infrequent. The facilitator's ratings do not show amount of change or perceived change only amount of attainment development from one person's perspective. This limits the utility of

the facilitator rating to assess whether the encounter group was responsible for beneficial change, but does provide a more "absolute" rather than "relative" level of maturity. Therefore, the instructor's ratings show that the students' maturity on the core conditions do represent a meaningful maturity. Still, by using this combination of perspectives, time periods, and sampling, it was intended to provide significant opportunity for triangulating how core conditions are fostered by classical person-centered encounter groups. While this approach to providing descriptive information is thorough and provides significant depth to understanding how person-centered encounter groups foster development, it does not provide substantial breadth.

Additionally, while not typical of the students, it is possible that students were enrolled in other "process-oriented" classes or taking the class "out-of-order" rather than during their first semester. It is also unclear whether they may have been involved in other experiences outside the encounter group (e.g., psychotherapy), which may account for some of the changes observed. The study involved one facilitator, two encounter groups, and 30 participants, making the generalizability of its findings limited due to sample size.

Conclusion and Implications for Research and Training

The evidence presented clearly shows support that viewed from various angles classical person-centered encounter groups can provide for substantial development along the core conditions for counselors-in-training. Students report substantial increases, observer noted significant focus and maturation in authenticity, and the facilitator observes most participants to be beyond the "emerging" range and into the "accepting" if not typically "embracing" range of dispositional development. Further research could investigate the magnitudes of changes in self-perceived growth, maturation, and attainment of high levels of core conditions comparing encounter groups with different facilitators and different training methods, such as skills workshops, supervised practice, or role-plays.

This study provides support for the conducting of encounter groups in the training of person-centered psychotherapists and suggests that different perspectives on measurement result in different constructs even if each of them generally concurred that encounter groups are beneficial for fostering core condition development. Further research could show to what extent different perspectives are inter-related or discrete, and whether a particular perspective (e.g, student's, observer's, or facilitator's) provides more predictive power in therapy outcomes, supervisor ratings in internships, or other criterion. It could also

investigate whether a model that integrates these three perspectives may provide a superior vantage point for measurement.

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