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Mindfully Educating Our Future: The MESG Curriculum for Training Emergent Counselors

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The 2009 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs standards (II.G.6.e) and the Association for Specialists in Group Work both promote and support counselors in training (CITs) having direct experience as group members. Counselor educators must develop experiential group curricula, which intentionally facilitate CIT growth and development, while meeting ethical and accreditation standards. The Mindfulness Experiential Small Group (MESG) Curriculum was developed to assist in meeting and exceeding these standards. The skills obtained through the MESG can provide CITs with ways to manage academic and emotional challenges while facilitating counselor development in a group context.

Keywords: *counselor training; group work; mindfulness; personal growth; training*

Counselors in training (CITs) face significant challenges as they proceed through their training program (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992, 2003). CITs are asked to participate in training that requires self-awareness and reflection, the ability to face ambiguity, and to learn new skills for interpersonal interaction.

Anxiety and perceptions of doubt related to their ability to be successful are prevalent for many future counselors (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003; Skovholt, Rønnestad, & Jennings, 1997). While navigating these emotional shifts, CITs are also expected and trained to develop cognitive complexity and self-awareness to manage ambiguity in the classroom and with clients, in order to address multicultural competence and become ethical practitioners (Lambert & Barley, 2001; Rogers, 1957; Wilkinson, 2011).

Counselor educators face the challenge of developing an experiential group curriculum that best facilitates the developmental needs of the CIT while focusing on the growth of counseling skills and professional identity. In this article, the authors discuss relevant literature regarding experiential learning (EL), experiential pedagogy, and the use of the Mindfulness Experiential Small Group (MESG) Curriculum in group training for promoting awareness in CITs (Greason & Cashwell, 2009). The authors present the results of a qualitative pilot study implementing the MESG at a mountain west university, which together with other empirical evidence (Baer, 2003; Brown, Marquis, & Guiffrida, 2013) informed the content of this work. The MESG is a small group experience providing an orientation, awareness, and application of mindfulness techniques that meet Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards, are informed by the American Counseling Association (ACA) ethical codes, and Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) Group Competencies.

Gladding asserts that when developing a group, the format and rationale should be grounded in theory to increase opportunity for productive member responses and group outcomes (Gladding, 2012). While there are a number of theories to understand group development, the choice to use Yalom and Leszcz (2005) building blocks of orientation, conflict, and cohesion was made because they parallel CIT developmental needs (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992, 2003). The MESG meets a primary learning need whereby CITs engage in mindfulness practice as an orientation to group process. For example, during conflict, mindfulness practice is used to foster the suspension of judgment of self and others. Moreover, mindfulness skills are used to enhance the development of group cohesion. Additional learning takes place through the integration of reflective journaling (Luke & Kiweewa, 2010) and group leader feedback (Harel, Schechtman, & Cutrona, 2012) following each group meeting. Counselor educators or doctoral students can serve as group facilitators who review CIT reflective journals and provide feedback through written Socratic questioning. Through feedback, facilitators encourage deeper reflection, self-awareness, and potential actions CITs can choose to integrate

in their MESG. The MESG can help counselor educators develop and provide CITs with an opportunity to participate in learning mindfulness skills, engage in the group process, and be exposed to techniques for use with clients. This provides a unique opportunity for EL, which has been found to enhance the quality of learning and increase skill development and integration (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Falco & Bauman, 2004; Harel et al., 2012; Kolb, 1984).

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

The MESG is based on the principles of EL, which can be defined as "a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, 2013, "What is experiential learning?" para. 3). Counselor education has a history of valuing EL in training (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Falco & Bauman, 2004; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; Osborn, Daninhirsch, & Page, 2003) as it deepens the level of understanding and personal growth of CITs (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Ferch, St. John, & Ramsey, 2006; Harrawood, McClure, & Nelson, 2011; Kiweewa, Gilbride, Luke & Seward, 2013; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010). Critical to counselor development, EL fosters self and other awareness by accessing cognitive and affective stages of learning (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Falco & Bauman, 2004; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Harel, et al., 2012; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010).

A pilot study conducted by two of the authors is presented in this article and informed the development and implementation of the MESG. The study qualitatively explored the process of students' experience of participation in a mindfulness small group. Participants were interviewed on two occasions with one of them being an interpretive dialogue. While simultaneously investigating the impact of the experience on both personal and professional development, the implementation of the MESG provided opportunity for intentional learning through participation in a small group focused on mindfulness.

CACREP standards (2009) and ASGW group competencies (2000) support group experiential education by requiring all CITs have a minimum of 10 hr of direct experience as a group member (II.G.6.e). The ASGW professional training standards (2000) recommend at least 10 hr and promotes 20 hr of experiential training for CITs as group members, leaders, and observers. CACREP provides standards and guidelines; however, each counselor education program is challenged uniquely to develop specific strategies and educational experiences to

meet these standards for group work in their curriculum (Anderson & Price, 2001; Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993; Shumaker, Ortiz, & Brenninkmeyer, 2011). Programs have chosen to meet these experiential requirements in a variety of ways such as instructor led groups, self-directed groups, non-instructor led groups, activity based groups, and psychodrama groups.

Experiential group training has been shown to be effective in counselor development. For example, in a qualitative study, Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, and Young (2009) found themes of CITs gaining personal awareness, professional development, and programmatic awareness through participating in an experiential growth group. Participants stated feeling prepared to lead a group after being a member of a group and reported personal growth as a result of the experience. Kiweewa et al. (2013) identified student growth factors in experiential training groups, which influenced CIT awareness. Harel et al. (2012) found support behaviors focused on esteem, attentiveness, and emotions essential for personal growth while Luke and Kiweewa (2010) found the integration of reflective journaling to be impactful on overall growth and development. Kline, Falbaum, Pope, Hargraves, and Hundley (1997) shared that the small group experience was critical and found interpersonal awareness and relational insight were key points of growth gained through experience. As a result of the review of the literature and the outcomes of the pilot study, it was found that awareness, experiential education, personal growth, skill development, and engagement in personal reflection were essential variables to be included in the MESG. Experiential learning was a consistent factor in the literature, providing the rationale for use of a pedagogy that compliments experiential education.

EXPERIENTIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY

When creating curriculum for the training experience, a foundational pedagogy that meets the needs of the instructor and the purposes of the course is integral. In designing the MESG, an experiential constructivist pedagogy provided a foundation for facilitating personal awareness and counselor development. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) stated that a person's experiences influence one's ability to develop cognitive complexity about those experiences. McAuliffe and Eriksen (2011) stated that a constructivist approach to teaching group counseling where learning through active experience was helpful to personal growth and development. The authors wrote that CITs must experience "being in a group" concurrently to learning "what is happening in the group" (p. 137). Dewey (1938) wrote that experience

was an essential component of profound learning encompassing both the physicality of being confronted with learning, and reflection on these physical experiences. Gowin (1981) described "felt-significance" in education as a moment when emotions and learning connect. The MESG allows CITs the opportunity to interact in ways that promote "felt-significance" engaging in learning and emotional connection. Educators are encouraged to incorporate EL into their pedagogy (Dewey, 1938; Gowin, 1981; Kolb, 1984; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011) as a mechanism to consolidate effective student learning. The intent of the MESG was to follow Dewey, Kolb, and Gowin in providing two layers of EL through participation in and reflection on the group experience.

MINDFULNESS IN COUNSELOR TRAINING

The MESG uses experiential mindfulness principles to facilitate participation in and reflection on the group experience. Mindfulness is a process for changing individual perspective of thoughts and feelings and applies to a wide range of activities and practices (Chrisman, Christopher, & Lichtenstein, 2009; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Hanh 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993b; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008). Experiential training and practice provides opportunity for a lived experience versus a didactic conceptual discussion. Mindfulness can be further described as an observational activity of the senses and inner experiences, without evaluation or judgment (Bishop et al., 2004). In contrast, experiences of mindlessness occur when attention and awareness capacities are scattered due to preoccupation with past or future concerns. Preoccupation is a behavior counselor educators want CITs to avoid to reduce distraction in the counseling process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Johns, 2012; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011) and maintain a focus on the client.

Several cognitive behavioral modalities have foundations in mindfulness. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) involves meditation, relaxation, and yoga practices, shown to be effective for the management of stress, chronic pain, and illness (Baer, 2003). Additionally, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) which has roots in mindfulness has been shown to be effective in reducing self-injurious behaviors, suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, depression, and bulimic behavior (Robins & Chapman, 2004). Furthermore, research has provided evidence for mindfulness-based interventions for treatment of anxiety and addiction (Baer, 2003; Didonna, 2009).

Mindfulness was selected as the focus of an experiential small group for CITs due to empirical evidence (Baer, 2003; Brown et al.,

2013) supporting its ability to increase awareness of both internal and external processes of interaction (Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Woods, 2009). Greason and Cashwell (2009) found that mindfulness could be used to train the emergent counselor to be more aware of their internal thoughts and feelings as well as remain non-judgmentally focused on the present moment. Stauffer and Pehrsson (2012) recommended that counselors understand how to integrate mindfulness skills into everyday life as well as practice mindfulness methods regularly. A review of the literature reveals, however, that counselor educators have little direction on how to cultivate the internal habits of mind necessary for self-reflection and controlling attention (Greason & Cashwell, 2009).

Promotion of personal growth and development is viewed as a foundation of counselor training and supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Johns, 2012; Neufeldt, 2007; Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001). The ACA *Code of Ethics* acknowledges that as part of counselor education, there are "training components that encourage self-growth or self-disclosure as part of the training process" (ACA, 2014, p. 14 Section F.8.a). Furthermore, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) highlights CITs self-awareness as one critical area to address in supervision (ACES, 2011).

Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth (1982) list emotional awareness as an important part of counselor identity formation while Johns (2012) states that awareness of self and others should be seen as the "cornerstone of counseling training" (p. 17). However, an initial review of the literature produced little research regarding specific strategies or experiences that can be incorporated into counselor preparation programs to promote personal growth and development in CITs (Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010).

As a result of training standards (CACREP, 2009), participation in an experiential group has become an established part of counselor training. According to Yalom and Leszcz (2005), group work has the capacity to provide an emotional learning experience about acceptance, self-disclosure, and insight into one's own strengths and weaknesses. They elaborate further on the "experiential classroom training group" as straddling "the blurred borders between personal growth, support, education, and therapy" (p. xii). A study by Newsome, Waldo, and Gruzska (2012) suggested that learning about and using mindfulness in group work helps group members learn to be more conscious and present in their lives. Therefore, mindfulness training and experience as a focus in a small group has potential to meet these standards while promoting CIT awareness, personal growth, and development.

MESG CURRICULUM AND DESIGN

As noted above, the MESG Curriculum was designed in accordance with the CACREP accreditation standards, which recommend CITs participate in a minimum of 10 hr in a small group activity (CACREP, 2009). Additionally, Yalom's theory of group development (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) was used to provide a foundation for the curriculum design of the MESG. The three phases of the MESG were developed and implemented around Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) three group building block stages of orientation, conflict, and cohesion. The specific mindfulness skills incorporated in each session were utilized intentionally to ground each developmental MESG phase with the corresponding group stage. Additionally, three of Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) therapeutic factors, (a) imparting information (b) group cohesion, and (c) interpersonal learning, were also incorporated intentionally into the MESG. One rationale is that through imparting information, a framework for interpersonal learning is established for the group. Then, facilitating group cohesion becomes a priority whereby the environment is set for the therapeutic process to unfold and allow individual members the opportunity to experience interpersonal learning.

Theoretically, prioritization of these three therapeutic factors in the MESG serves to vicariously incorporate other therapeutic factors of group work. For example, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) hypothesize, when members are present in the group microcosm, they experience universality; and are not alone in their feelings. Additionally, by witnessing other members' success, they may obtain hope. The interpersonal learning process in group offers the opportunity to assist other group members and as a result gain a feeling of altruism. The group as a microcosm of interpersonal learning facilitates a corrective emotional experience of family of origin dynamics, socializing techniques, and imitative behavior. Through their individual interpersonal learning, members experience catharsis. Throughout the entire interpersonal learning process, members have opportunities to explore and come to the realizations of her or his own existential factors, values, and beliefs. Each group meeting maintains a structure and routine of incorporating Yalom's therapeutic factors while adding mindfulness skills and exercises to expand the comfort levels of the participants. The MESG culminates with the application of skills learned to counseling sessions and working with clients.

Phase I: Mindful Orientation and Setting the Stage

The MESG is an 8-week course with a pre-group interview session (see Table 1). Campbell and Christopher (2012) recommend the leaders

Table 1   Overview of MESG Curriculum

Phase I: Mindful Orientation

Week 1   Pre-group Interview—Interview each participant individually to establish rapport and to provide an overview of the group experience. Inquire about previous group experiences, current expectations, strengths, and group safety.

Week 2   Confidentiality, Group rules, Experiential ice breakers—Psychoeducation: Discuss themes from pre-group interviews to promote universality. Summarize goal of group is to learn mindfulness skills, gain insight, awareness, and personal growth. Experiential: Dyad icebreaker, feeling/emotional check-in, and facilitate establishment of group norms. Preview definition of mindfulness.

Week 3   History and General Overview of Mindfulness—Psychoeducation: Explore definition of mindfulness, core concepts, brief history, uses in counseling, and rationale for use in counselor training. Experiential: Mindfulness activity of listening as a call to awareness of the present moment.

Phase II: Mindful Awareness

Week 4   Mindful Breathing—Psychoeducation: Provide case examples or explore book, "Let's Do Nothing!" (Fucile, 2009) to normalize difficulty with sustaining being fully present in each moment. Experiential: Short guided breathing exercises.

Week 5   Mindfulness of the Body—Psychoeducation: Explore the relationship of emotions and body sensations. Experiential: Facilitate process activity. Assist members to notice body sensations while suspending judgment of self and others.

Week 6   Mindfulness of the Mind—Psychoeducation: Expand focus from body to thoughts. Illustrate that through practice of these skills members can learn to move from content to process within themselves. Experiential: Provide process prompts and encourage members to sit in awareness noticing thoughts without judgment of self. Encourage expression of thoughts, feelings, and feedback while maintaining a position of non-judgment toward self and others.

Phase III: Mindful Application

Week 7   Being in the Present Moment—Psychoeducation: Expand to combine awareness of senses, body sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Experiential: Guided relaxation exercises with long periods of silence. Process experience of incorporating mindfulness skills.

Week 8   Application to Counseling, Initiate Discussion of Termination—Psychoeducation: Provide summary of learning experience. Highlight use in personal lives and when working with clients. Connect skills with pre-practicum skill building and experiences. Experiential: Prompt discussion of termination and any unfinished group business. Practice mindfulness skills.

Week 9   Final Summary Activity, Process Group Experience, Termination—Experiential: Engage group in a closing ritual. Process thoughts and feelings using mindfulness skills.

have mindfulness training and a personal mindfulness practice before facilitating a group. Prior to the beginning of the pre-group interview process, facilitators provide a handout to each group member outlining

the purpose and intent of the group, to introduce an orientation to the MESG, and set the stage for mindfulness. The handout is used as a frame of reference to provide foundational information about mindfulness and reduce the potential to overwhelm CITs with new information in the first session. During the pre-group interview, open-ended questions are asked of the participants such as, "What strengths do you possess that will contribute to the group experience being meaningful for yourself and your peers?" Another is, "Tell us what your expectations are of this experience regarding yourself, your peers and of the group facilitators?" Responses to the interview questions are reviewed by the group facilitators for emergent themes, which are then incorporated into the first group meeting to promote universality (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Table 1 contains an overview of the mindfulness curriculum, and is organized according to Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) theory and to provide a representation of how mindfulness is purposefully integrated into the small group experience. The MESG phases of mindful orientation, mindful awareness, and application of mindfulness skills are organized in a developmentally appropriate manner to facilitate CIT growth and self-awareness during the orientation, conflict, and cohesion stages of group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

The first session of the MESG includes the presentation and review of the informed consent, limits of confidentiality, and the integration of an experiential icebreaker (Merta et al., 1993) culminating in the presentation and processing of the collective themes from the pre-group interview. In the second session, facilitators provide a general overview of mindfulness and engage the group in an icebreaker activity. During the third session, a ritual used worldwide for mindfulness, the ringing of a bowl shaped bell, is introduced, and incorporated into the opening and closing to call each group member to mindfulness for each subsequent session (Hanh, 1975). The definition and examples of mindfulness are reviewed, coupled with examples of mindlessness. During the initial stages of group development, the facilitators use didactic instruction to impart information on critical aspects of mindfulness (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) including a brief history and general overview. This is done to ease discomfort and at the same time provide opportunities for the facilitators to convey an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard for the members (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). In addition, the members are introduced to critical concepts of group process during the first phase of group through integration into the didactic instruction, thus allowing an opportunity at the outset of the experience to learn valuable developmental information. The decision of how many sessions to convey information can be group specific. The MESG provides room for the facilitators to be sensitive to the delicate balance of

simultaneously providing information and opportunities for learning and personal growth (Kolb, 1984).

Mindfulness is introduced as historically grounded but independent of religious and cultural traditions. Mindfulness is operationally defined as intentional attention and is explained as a way of cultivating an awareness of self, others, and living non-judgmentally in the present moment (Linehan, 1993b). The MESG includes awareness exercises and practices of experiencing the present moment and encouraging observations of external as well as internal stimuli (Linehan, 1993b). For example, guided exercises are facilitated with a focus on the breath and body sensations to increase awareness of internal stimuli (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Additionally, homework assignments such as identifying an object or event within daily life (such as the sound of a telephone) to serve as a mindfulness reminder, are incorporated to increase individual focus on awareness of internal thoughts and feelings and external stimuli (Hanh, 1975, Stauffer & Pehrsson, 2012). Facilitated group processing, reflective journal writing, and facilitator feedback are integrated into the experience to promote personal growth and development (Osborn et al., 2003). Each week members are asked to reflect in writing on their group experience articulating what was learned about self, self in relation to the group, and about the group members. Following this, the group facilitators review each reflection and provide feedback in the form of Socratic questioning, encouraging interaction in a reciprocal dialogue (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) thus promoting engagement of the group process.

The initial group session is used to provide didactic education with subsequent sessions transitioning to less and less instruction. It is important to avoid conceptualizing the transitional phase of moving into group development as a linear progression, keeping a strong sense of the immediate group needs to identify what might be the most beneficial each session (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Mindfulness exercises that build awareness and promote bonding are introduced to carry the group toward being a more cohesive entity. An example of a beginning mindfulness activity during this phase is a guided breathing exercise to practice focusing attention on the breath, noticing thoughts that come into the mind, and accepting them without judgment or commentary. The group members are asked to notice when their minds stray from the exercise and to simply go back to focusing on the breath, again without judgment or self-criticism (Newsome et al., 2012). There is an emphasis on the promotion of group cohesion while integrating a measure of structure (Gowin, 1981; Kolb, 1984; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Then, by gradually reducing structure, the group can transition to the middle phase of mindful awareness and group development to take possession of their mindfulness group experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Phase II: Mindful Awareness and Group Development

In this phase, the group leaders can facilitate process through the use of encouragement (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) coupled with mindfulness practices (Greason & Cashwell, 2009) to assist the group members in the development of awareness skills for personal use and eventually within the counseling setting. Keep in mind that group development is situational and some groups could move into this phase in a different time span. During weeks four through six, exercises are introduced for the purpose of facilitating cohesion and allowing for application of mindfulness skills. The use of guided exercises focusing on breathing, body sensations, and the observation of thoughts are highlighted during this phase. In one exercise, the participants are asked to express how they experience another group member and in turn, that member is encouraged to apply mindfulness skills to embrace and accept the feedback, noticing internal feelings without judgment or verbal reactions. Additionally, the group members are encouraged to cultivate awareness of where the feelings are located in the body and how fleeting they really are when asked to intentionally do nothing but notice them. This skill can help the CIT outside of the group to navigate anxiety, ambiguity, and personalization issues brought out in a classroom, during a counseling session, or within supervision.

This phase emphasizes the therapeutic group experience and factors that happen developmentally during the conflict stage (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Furthermore, the facilitators are encouraged to maintain a focus on the underlying processes of the group members and facilitate the application and use of mindfulness skills to aid in interpersonal learning and development (Greason & Cashwell, 2003; Johns, 2012). Through participant reflective journaling, and weekly facilitator comments, group members are educated, encouraged, supported, and challenged to apply mindfulness skills in the here-and-now to facilitate personal growth and development (Osborn et al., 2003, Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The facilitators encourage members to state difficult here-and-now thoughts and feelings or reflections from their journals. The facilitators provide support to the members to incorporate and practice mindfulness skills, also in the here-and-now, when group members are experiencing difficult emotions.

Phase III: Mindful Application

During the final phase of the MESG, the objective is for group members to further transition into a period of operationalizing mindfulness both in and out of the small group setting. In weeks seven through nine, facilitators engage the group in exercises that encompass the skills learned previously. The expansion of group processing provides

opportunities in which the facilitators can use immediacy to encourage the use of mindfulness skills in the present moment of the group. In this phase, the group facilitators focus on encouraging member integration of mindfulness in areas of their life outside of the small group. Facilitator encouragement sets the stage for incorporating mindfulness skills obtained through the MESG to manage academic and emotional challenges as well as interventions to incorporate into professional clinical practice. Within this phase, the group facilitators have the opportunity to assist the CITs in acknowledging development of a professional identity, growth of interpersonal awareness, and the integration of a skill that transcends personal and professional development.

Within the final phase of the MESG, the group facilitator is challenged to assist the CIT in identifying the value of further development of intrapersonal process awareness and how this aids in viewing process dimensions central to the art of group counseling. As the group process moves to a close it is critical for learning to be synthesized in a manner where the CIT leaves the experience fully aware of the value of the group experience and the significance of mindfulness within the therapeutic environment. As an integral part of counselor training it is imperative that educators, and in this instance the group facilitators, impart the value of the group experience for both CITs and the clients with whom they will interact in their future.

EVALUATING THE MESG

The evolution of the MESG included the integration of data and feedback from one group's participation in a pilot study of their experiences. The authors obtained IRB approval to conduct a pilot study, using Charmaz' constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006), to develop a baseline from which to inform further MESG research. Participants were enrolled in a small group experience with a focus on mindfulness in their first year and participated in the interpretive dialogue nearly a year after beginning the MESG. The pilot study was guided by the overarching question "What happened during your participation in a mindfulness experiential small group" and follow-up questions sought to gain a deeper understanding. The follow-up questions included, "What experiences from the MESG do you perceive as being significant?" and "What was the impact of the process on other areas of your experience?" Intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2006) was used to go beneath the surface level of the initial narrative to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the participants. Interviews were transcribed and coded by the first author.

Both open and axial coding was used to extract emergent themes. All authors have had doctoral level training and experience in qualitative research methodologies, two authors are counselor educators, and three are doctoral candidates. Trustworthiness was conducted through two authors reviewing transcripts and coding for accuracy. Round two consisted of an engaged interpretive dialogue interview (Coe Smith, 2007) to provide each participant the opportunity to review and validate the themes or change as necessary. Emergent categories were Levels of Knowing (various levels of comfort related to ambiguity about the emergent group process), Relationships (navigating a wide range of emotional reactions related to relationships both within and outside of the group), Receiving Feedback (identifying and labeling emotions rather than reacting when receiving feedback), Application of Mindfulness in Counseling (use of mindfulness skills during counseling sessions), Personal Growth and Awareness (awareness of feelings connected to self and others), and Impact of Process Outside of Group (how mindfulness skills can be incorporated outside of group).

When asked what experiences from the small group were significant, all participants reported the mindfulness practice to be useful. The application of mindfulness theme is found in the thoughts of one participant who stated, "I think it was significant for me as a counselor to learn about mindfulness. I have used techniques from group with my clients." The participant went on to say, "Mindfulness really is a useful tool, personally, too." One excerpt related to the categorical theme of growth and awareness was: "There were some parts of me that I was completely unaware of" evidencing an awareness of self. An example of the critical value of relationships is evident in one participant's thoughts; "group members are factors that influenced my experience." Another participant shared, "nobody judged me, nobody didn't believe me, nobody didn't wish I wasn't in the room anymore." Additionally, the authors witnessed the CITs incorporate mindfulness practice in multiple ways outside of the group experience. The results of the pilot study evidence support for the use of mindfulness in the small group.

A benefit of the MESG for students was that it provided a personal outlet for managing stress and anxiety. The results of the pilot study revealed that nearly 1 year after the MESG experience, CITs were consistently using mindfulness in their personal lives and in their clinical work. One challenge identified in the pilot study is represented in the following participant excerpt: "I think there might have even been a little bit of unfinished business in our cohort that kind of cropped up right at the end. And so I think it would have been good to work that out as a group." This excerpt illustrates the need to assess if a full semester experience would be better suited for the implementation of the MESG and influence the development of the MESG by highlighting the need

for continued support. As a result, during the MESG Phase III, there was an intention to emphasize the continued use of mindfulness skills outside of group and in the personal lives of group members.

Additionally, some CITs had little exposure to experiential education and initially found the process to be perplexing. This informed the development of the didactic portion in the Mindful Orientation phase to ease developmental transition into experiential education. Another challenge identified in the pilot study that was addressed in MESG development was the connection of the experience by some participants to formal religious practices. This finding provided a mechanism for supporting student growth, while removing religious connotation. Benefits for utilizing this model include facilitating the group experience for developing counselors with the MESG Curriculum thus providing a framework for the group process.

CONCLUSIONS

Counselor education programs can incorporate the MESG into the training curriculum to not only meet ACA *Code of Ethics*, but also to exceed the minimum ASGW and CACREP standards. Using the MESG responds to recommendations in the literature (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Falco & Bauman, 2004; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; Osborn et al., 2003), by providing EL opportunities while building transferable skills. An additional benefit is that the MESG provides a framework grounded in the literature that supports and enhances CIT development. Mindfulness is a transcendent skill that will enhance counselor development in a multi-dimensional way; therefore, having the MESG as a framework for engendering such outcomes optimizes student learning in clinical, personal growth, and professional well-being domains. An enthusiastic commitment to the spirit of implementing the MESG must be tempered by counselor educators and group facilitators being aware of the impact of mindfulness and the potential for traumatic material to surface. To ethically address this potential, it is important for group leaders to have training in mindfulness as well as a personal mindfulness practice before leading others in a practice themselves (Campbell & Christopher, 2012).

The MESG Curriculum provides opportunity for conceptual, experiential, and foundational learning experiences, concrete and reflective observations, and "felt-significance" as a process of individual learning. Future research is needed that explores the efficacy of mindfulness in this and other areas of counselor development curricula. For example, quantitative explorations of mindfulness as a tool to reduce CIT anxiety, increase counselor efficacy, and improve the therapeutic

relationship would be useful endeavors. A pre-post design with an experimental and control group could explore the impact of mindfulness practice on CITs in these critical areas. A qualitative replication of the grounded theory pilot study would be useful to test the findings using the data gathered to guide the development of the overarching research question. In addition, qualitative exploration of the experiences of CITs and the development of therapeutic relationships can enhance the professional understanding of mindfulness as tool to be further integrated into other curricular experiences.

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