



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

Group Work and Out of School Time Programs: How Afterschool Programs Benefit from Group Work Practice

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ABSTRACT

Afterschool programs play an important role in youth development and in keeping children safe outside of school. This presentation aims to analyze the need for group work practice in the out-of-school-time program settings. Ways in which group work models can improve afterschool programs by supporting social emotional skill development, cognitive development, conflict resolution, and cohesion in schools will be explained.

Through group typology the author recommends strategies for groups in out-of-school-time (OST) or after school programming. The poster aims to analyze current practices in OST programs in order to identify how they can benefit from group work practice and provide recommendations for OST programs.

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INTRODUCTION

This poster analyzes group work and after school or out-of-school-time (OST) literature and practices to identify gaps that improve OST programming. Using afterschool programs in a Midwest city in the U.S, the author discusses how high-quality programming can be improved when supported by group work models. Using group work typology, the author will discuss how group qualities can be used. Afterschool programs are pivotal to youth safety. Programs provide a space where children are safe, and receive positive interactions that support their social, emotional, and cognitive skills (National Institute on Out-of-School-Time (NIOST), 2006). Additionally, literature shows, when OST programs are incorporated in some of the U.S.'s high crime neighborhoods, certain crime rates decreased. Afterschool programs can also build student interest in school, build a bridge between families and schools, strengthen identity and peer relations, and provide supportive networks to youth (Riggs and Medina, 2005).

The author conducted a literature review on group work in OST settings. The author will use personal experiences from working in an afterschool program to describe best practices in OST. Through group typology the author will give recommendations for groups in OST programming. The author will focus on task groups, support groups, education groups, therapy groups, and socialization groups (Toseland and Rivas, 2012). Additionally, Yalom's therapeutic factors will be used to understand youth interactions in programs. The poster aims to analyze current practices in OST programs in order to identify how they can benefit from group work practice and provide recommendations for OST programs.

METHODS

The method used in this work was a descriptive literature review which intended to create a crosswalk between best practices in group work and out-of-school-time (OST). A descriptive literature review will allow the author to determine the extent to which patterns in OST overlap with group work. By finding the commonalities between the two fields of work, the writer would be able to find the gaps in OST and create recommendations in program strategies, professional development needs, and group work modalities.

LITERATURE REVIEW RESULTS

Youth serving organizations started in settlement houses where social work was also born. Overtime, social work and youth development (YD) agencies set on separate paths, with afterschool or out-of-school time (OST) programs being geared to recreation instead of social and emotional learning (SEL). In recent years that began to change, OST programs are now taking an approach that serves YD and SEL. This is an opportunity for continued growth in OST to adopt models from group work and maximize the benefits youth receive. Following are examples of current programs based on typology, therapeutic factors to consider fostering, and OST best practices that overlap with group work.

(Gitterman, & Salmon, 2009; Witt & Caldwell, 2018; Devaney, & Moroney, 2018)

GROUP TYPES: below are definitions & organizations for each group.

Task groups – can have the purpose of serving community needs through action groups, coalitions, or councils. *After School Matters' Peacemakers* program is “a six-week initiative that provides meaningful experiences for local teens to counter violence through positive contributions to their communities.”

Support groups – foster mutual aid to help cope with current and future life events. One organization that does this is *Youth Guidance*, their mission is “to create and implement school-based programs that enable children to overcome obstacles, focus on their education and, ultimately, to succeed in school and in life.” Through programming like *Becoming a Man and Working on Womanhood*, youth from underserved communities can support each other in life challenges and important life transitions.

Education groups – help learn new information and skills, *Mikva Challenge* is a youth program whose mission is “to develop youth to be empowered, informed, and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society.” Here youth can learn to be active members of society who advocate for themselves and peers.

Therapy groups – help change behavior and cope with personal problems and rehabilitate themselves after trauma. *Youth Crossroads'* mission is “to act in the best interest of youth, guiding them through life's challenges, and inspiring them to discover new opportunities for personal development, healthy relationships, and positive community involvement.” YC offers youth counseling groups to support their youths' needs.

Socialization groups – help learn social skills and socially accepted behavior patterns. A national program that provides this is the *Boys and Girls Club*, the organizational mission is “to enable all young people, [...], to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.” BGC offers recreational programs for youth of all ages.

(Toseland, & Rivas, 2012)

YALOM'S THERAPEUTIC FACTORS & OST BEST PRACTICE:

Therapeutic factors that can be observed in OST include *universality, instillation of hope, imparting of information, imitative behavior, catharsis, and cohesion*. These can be found in the 10 Principles of Youth Development, and evaluation tools like the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) (a nationally recognized evidence-based tool that guides staff in to high quality programs). The recommendations section will include more connections.

(Witt & Caldwell, 2018; Devaney, & Moroney, 2018; Malone, & Donahue, 2018) (Yalom, 2006)

RECOMMENDATIONS

OST literature demonstrates the need for organizations and agencies provide professional development, professional training, and competency guidelines that support young professionals to be intentional with program curriculums and supports for the participating youth. Similarly, the author recommends group work training for staff and facilitators leading programs with youth in OST programs.

By providing a space where groups can experience Yalom's therapeutic factors, youth can gain more than just a physically safe space where they can be after school. Instead, youth can experience universality, instillation of hope, imparting of information, imitative behavior, catharsis, and cohesion. Additionally, by creating programs that fit group work types, staff can create curriculums that intentionally target positive youth development and skills that allow for success with agency missions.

Tools like the YPQA can provide guidelines for a starting place, however, training staff in group work would ease the transition to positive group work outcomes such as those in the programs mentioned.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations to the literature review include but are not limited to, using only case examples of programs and organizations from a Midwest city in the U.S., using case examples that are generally partnered with a school or school district, and using previous literature without additional data collection by the author.

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