

Article 9

Incorporating Technology Into a School Counseling Body Image Group

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Abstract

Technology is a part of the day-to-day world of today's students. In addition, today's K–12 schools are utilizing technology as part of their standard educational practices. To keep up with the times, today's school counselors can incorporate technology into their school counseling practices, in particular, small group counseling activities. The authors provide a sample self-esteem and body image group that demonstrates how Web 2.0 tools can be incorporated into group counseling practices.

Keywords: technology, small group counseling, body image group, Web 2.0 tools

School Counselors and Technology

The American School Counseling Association's (ASCA; 2010) ethical code offers little guidelines regarding the use of technology in school counseling practices. However, ASCA's code of ethics specifies that school counselors are to promote technological applications that are appropriate for student's individual needs (ASCA, 2010, A.10.a.). In addition, ASCA's comprehensive school counseling program model encourages school counselors to consider how district, state, and national initiatives and standards "complement and inform their program" (ASCA, 2012, p. 29).

One such national standard that is mentioned in the ASCA model is the *Framework for 21st Century Learning* (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2013). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is an organization comprised of renowned businesses such as Apple, Lego, Cengage Learning, Cisco, Intel, and Crayola. The partnership advocates for an increase in student technology readiness (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2013). In addition, they have designed a *Framework for 21st Century Learning* that outlines specific student outcomes such as information, media, and technology skills; learning and innovation skills; and 21st century themes. These technology readiness outcomes are expected to be a part of K–12 school’s core academic curriculum, as well as a part of the student’s development of life and career skills.

To meet these outcomes K–12 schools are adapting and integrating technology into standard educational practices (Campbell, 2012; Pritchett, Wohleb, & Pritchett, 2013; Rosefsky & Opfer, 2012; Sangani, 2013). This includes not only teachers utilizing technology in the classroom (Pritchett et al., 2013), but also school districts encouraging students to bring personal computers and devices (Sangani, 2013). Schools are also using online learning management systems, such as Instructor, Moodle and Edmodo, to enhance the use of technology in educational practices (Campbell, 2012). As collaborating faculty members, school counselors should also consider ways to integrate technology into their practices.

21st Century Students

It is crucial for counselors to increase their technological skills and evolve as the population does or else their skills could become outdated in light of modern culture (Castelnuovo, Gaggioli, Mantovani, & Riva, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Rausch & Gallo, 2013; Relijic, Harper & Crethar, 2013). Change in the work environment as a whole is only one indicator of how technology is impacting the school counseling profession. Technology also impacts the personal lives of today’s students (Rausch & Gallo, 2013).

Technology is a part of the day-to-day world of the 21st century student. Between 2004 and 2009, the amount of time that children between the ages of 2 and 11 spent online increased by 63% (Kessler, 2010). In addition, approximately 75% of students in grades 7 through 12 participated in at least one social media practice (Kessler, 2010). In fact “more than 500 million people are on Facebook, 200 million are on Twitter, and billions watch YouTube videos every day” (Johnson, 2011, p. 10). Students seek out information, communicate with friends, understand world events, and socialize through the use of technology (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Overall, today’s youth are using technology more and more (Kessler, 2010; Rosefsky & Opfer, 2012).

According to Rausch and Gallo (2013), the 21st century student’s phenomenological frame of reference is different from previous generations. They will never know the world without technology. Understanding and working from within this phenomenological frame of reference is an essential part of establishing and maintaining a counseling relationship (Nystul, 2011). Counselors who use technology may be better able to build rapport with today’s students (Froeschle, Crews & Li, 2013; Rausch & Gallo, 2013).

Incorporating Technology Into School Counseling Groups

One way to keep pace with the increasing use of technology is to modernize group counseling activities by incorporating free, Web 2.0 applications. Web 2.0 applications, also called Web 2.0 tools, are second-generation uses of the Internet that allow users to do more than read stagnant words on a computer screen. These applications allow users to interact with the computer through posting, replying, creating, and linking information. Examples range from Facebook to dippity.com. This article describes multiple free Web 2.0 applications and offers suggestions about how to incorporate these applications into a sample preexisting school counseling group plan.

When considering incorporating Web 2.0 applications into group counseling plans, it is not necessary to create completely new counseling groups. School counselors can substitute one or two free Web 2.0 applications in place of the current group activity. For example, Padlet (padlet.com) can be used to create an interactive collage complete with videos, sound, pictures, and text instead of a one-dimensional cut and paste collage made from magazine pictures. Web-based activities such as these will appeal to today's technology savvy students.

School counselors may also choose to incorporate the use of Web applications slowly, integrating technology over a period of time. For example, school counselors who are currently leading grief groups might have members write letters to loved ones who have died using the Web 2.0 application Storybird. When the group is run again, the school counselor can incorporate a second Web 2.0 application such as Padlet. Padlet can be used to share stories and information about the loved ones group members have lost. Group leaders can continue the process of adding one Web application at a time for as many sessions as desired. Today's students may be more drawn to technology-driven activities that embrace their culture.

Below, the authors outline an example of a group that has transitioned traditional group activities to Web 2.0 based activities. First, the authors explain how they selected the traditional group sessions for a body image psychoeducational group. Then they explain each of the group sessions and how a Web 2.0 application was utilized in each session.

Begin With Preexisting Group Sessions

The authors considered many available and preexisting group proposals and activities on a variety of topics. The authors selected self-esteem (in particular, body image) as their topic. The authors found many available group counseling activities on body self-esteem and body image. For example, 'Salvaging Sisterhood' (Taylor, 2005), 'Girl Power' (Camp & Wu, n.d.), 'Growing Up Girl: Preparing for Change Through Group Work' (Khattab & Jones, 2007), and 'Your Own Healthy Style: A Middle-School Curriculum to Enhance Body Image' (Stein & Bark, 2006). In addition, there are many activities that are commonly used to address body image issues. For example, all the above programs mentioned the impact of media on a girl's body image and self-esteem. Furthermore, research indicates that media has a powerful impact on how girls believe they "should" be or "should strive" to be (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Higginbotham & Baumgardner, 1996). Additional common topics and activities included addressing self-

talk and identification of positive role models. Based on the availability of activities that address self-esteem and body image, and because of the connection between self-esteem and academic success, the authors chose to provide a sample self-esteem and body image group that utilizes Web 2.0-based activities.

Sample School Counseling Group With Web 2.0 Applications

The psychoeducational group presented here addresses body image as it relates to self-esteem. The authors picked six common activities utilized in body image and self-esteem groups and used six different Web 2.0 applications as the basis for these activities. The sample group proposal below can be used as a template when considering how to incorporate Web 2.0 applications into other group counseling plans.

Opening Session

The purpose of the first group session is to allow group members to get to know each other as well as what to expect from group counseling. Following ethical group practices, group leaders are to discuss group norms, limits of confidentiality, and state the overall group purpose. In addition, group members may be asked to share their expectations of the group, as well as concerns about the group including what they are excited or nervous about.

After introductions and a review of group norms and procedures, the group will discuss the concept of journaling. Members will be expected to journal between group sessions throughout the duration of the 6-week group. Instead of a traditional journal, students will keep an electronic journal using the Web 2.0 tool Storybird (storybird.com). Storybird is a Web 2.0 application that presents like a blank book and offers authors countless pictures to illustrate their work. Users fill the blank pages with their own words and illustrations selected from the large library of available artwork.

Members will spend time in the first group session exploring Storybird artwork. Group members will explore artwork to identify pictures that reflect their views of body image. They will each select a final collection of images that will inspire and illustrate their weekly journaling. Members can explore the artwork in dyads or triads and share their reflections as they sort through the many Storybird images. Members will then share their selected inspirational picture(s) with the entire group. Possible processing questions include:

- Explain your picture(s) and why it inspires a story about self-esteem or body image.
- Share how the inspirational image relates to you.
- Having seen all the selected images and listened to what self-esteem and body image mean to this group, what images or aspects of self-esteem do you feel are missing?

To close the session, group leaders will explain that members will add to their Storybird every week. This week they are to use their inspirational picture and write a first entry.

Session 2

The purpose of this session is to explore what impacts self-esteem. Instead of using paper and pencil to brainstorm what impacts members' self-esteem, the group will utilize Mind42 (mind42.com). Mind42 is a Web 2.0 tool that allows users to create a mind map around a single concept. The application allows users to connect countless 'thought bubbles' filled with text or various multimedia selections. In addition, multiple users can simultaneously create to a single web.

The school counselor will create the Mind42 mind map and share the link with members. Members will co-create the single mind map around the concept of body image. They will add thought bubbles containing text, videos, music, YouTube videos, vine videos, photos, and other media of their choice. Student examples may be drawn from families, peers, social media, or even pop culture. After 15–20 minutes, the group will process the final, co-created Mind42 map.

After reviewing the mind map, the group will process the activity. Possible processing questions include:

- Are there any influences you just thought of that we should include?
- What do you think has the greatest impact on body image?
- What do you think impacts body image the least?
- Where does your own self-concept fit into this mind web?
- How does seeing this shared overall picture impact you?

As the group closes, remind members to add to their Storybird.

Session 3

The purpose of this session is to critically examine how female beauty is portrayed in the media. The Web 2.0 tool used for this session will be Padlet (Padlet.com). Padlet is a virtual blank 'wall' that users can write on as well as post videos, links, songs, and pictures. In addition, multiple users can simultaneously create a single wall. The final product looks like a wall filled with pictures and interactive links. Instead of merely cutting out magazine pictures of women for a paper collage, members will create a virtual collage that includes music videos, YouTube videos, songs, and pictures depicting how women are portrayed in the media.

The group leader will create a Padlet wall and share the link with the group members. Each member will search online for images of women in the media. Members will search the Internet for virtual ads, commercials, songs, and more. The school counselor may want to post specific information on photoshopping such as *Dove Evolution* (Piper, 2006). Group leaders might also consider posting information included in the YouTube video *Killing Us Softly* (Challenging Media, 2010).

Once time for searching the Internet has expired, the group can come together to watch the videos, listen to the songs, visit any sites, and discuss the overall information on the wall as a whole. After members review the wall, they can process how the overall wall impacts them. Possible processing questions include:

- What is it like for you to look at this wall of unrealistic images of women?
- What messages do these ads send to young teenage girls about how they should look?

- How do you feel you are personally affected by these messages?
- How difficult is it to live in the perpetual shadow of these images?

As the group comes to a close remind members to add to their Storybird.

Session 4

The purpose of the fourth session is for members to explore their own beliefs about their bodies and appearances. The group session will follow the format of the YouTube *Dove Real Beauty Sketches* (Dove—United States, 2013). The group leader will need to watch the video prior to the session. What is unique about this session is that group members will watch the video and experience how they are critical of their own beauty.

To begin the group, the leader will pair up group members. Pairs will sit back to back. Then, each member will verbally describe herself to her partner as if she was talking to a sketch artist. As one girl describes herself, her partner will make a list of key words such as short hair, fat face, big nose, pretty eyes, and so forth. Once the self-descriptions are complete, partners will read the list of key words back to their partner or to the entire group. Then the group will briefly process the descriptions. Sample questions that may be asked of partners may include:

- What feature(s) are you most critical about?
- What feature(s) are you least critical about?
- What is your reaction to hearing your descriptions of yourself?

After this activity, members will watch the YouTube clip, *Dove Real Beauty Sketches*. After watching the YouTube clip, members will process their reaction to the video and how it relates to the previous activity. Possible processing questions include:

- What are your reactions to this video?
- How are you similarly critical of yourself?
- How might being so harsh on yourself taint what you believe others think about you and how they see you compared to what they actually see and think?
- Do you have any thoughts about where you get your particular messages about beauty?

In closing, have group members sit back to back again and instead of describing themselves, have them describe their partner. Have group members read out key descriptive words, such as pretty hair, kind eyes, smile, cool outfit, and so forth. To end the session, ask group members how it was to hear the positive descriptions. As the group comes to a close, remind members to add to their Storybird based on what they discovered today.

Session 5

The purpose of this session is to identify positive role models and qualities of strong women. The main activity of this session will use Fakebook (<http://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page>) to create a 'profile page' for a role model. Instead of creating a hand written description or drawing a picture of a role model this session will use Fakebook. Fakebook is a site similar to Facebook that allows users to fill

in a blank template to create pages for fictional or famous individuals. In addition members can search the site for pages that have been previously created for individuals.

Members will identify role models such as Gabby Douglas, Taylor Swift, or Jennifer Lawrence. After selecting role models, members will use the Internet to research information about their selected role model. After they have located information about their role model, members will create a Fakebook page. The Fakebook page will include descriptions of the selected role models such as demographic information, interests, positive attributes, and what makes her a good role model.

Once each member has completed a Fakebook page for her role model, she will have the opportunity to share it with the group. Members will share why this person is a role model. After hearing about each member's role model, the group can consider what all the role models have in common. Finally, the group will process the activity. Possible processing questions include:

- Why might it be difficult to be like your role model?
- If you could talk to your role model, what do you think he or she would say to you?

As the session comes to a close, remind members to add to their Storybird. Finally, remind members that the next session will be the last session.

Session 6

The purpose of this session is to allow group members the opportunity to reflect on their time together and say good-bye. In addition, group members will have the opportunity to share their finished Storybirds. The final group session will begin with members sharing their Storybirds. Afterwards, the group will spend time formally terminating the group and saying good-bye. Tagxedo (<http://www.tagxedo.com/>) will be utilized in the saying good-bye activity. Tagxedo is a Web 2.0 application that creates word clouds in countless shapes and colors. Members enter in words and the application forms the words into the selected shape. The final word cloud can be printed or the link can be shared or posted.

Group members will work together to create word clouds for each member of the group. The group will focus on one member at a time. As members focus on each member they will shout out positive, encouraging words that describe that member. The group leader will type the words into the Tagxedo site. Repeated words are entered numerous times. After a word cloud is created for each member the group will view the final products. The completed word cloud can be e-mailed to each individual member. The member can then decide if she would like to post it on any social media sights such as Instagram, Tumblr, or Facebook. In addition, each member's Tagxedo can be printed for that member to keep. After the group has completed a Tagxedo for each member, some final processing questions will close the group. These questions can include:

- What will you remember most about our time together?
- Is there anything you would like to say to anyone or to the group as we part ways?
- What is difficult about saying good-bye?

Considerations and Ethics

There are several considerations when implementing Web 2.0 applications into group counseling practices. First, it is important that school counselors be familiar with the Web 2.0 tool. While the applications listed above are simple to use, it will require time to become familiar with how each application works. In addition, the group members will need to be familiar with the applications. Group sessions will require extra time for group members to become familiar with the applications. To work around the time needed for students to become familiar with the Web 2.0 applications, the school counselor can provide a list of the Web 2.0 applications prior to the start of the group. Members can become familiar with the applications outside of group, prior to their use in the group. It appears logical that today's technology savvy students will enjoy activities that are web based, making it worth the extra time spent learning about the various Web 2.0 tools.

It is also important to keep in mind that on rare occasions Web sites crash and are unavailable until site developers fix the problem. It is suggested that school counselors test Web sites just before group sessions begin to avoid being caught off guard during the group session. Another suggestion to manage these possible site failures is to be flexible about the order of the group sessions. Flexibility in group sessions will allow the group to go on as scheduled. It is also possible that if the site is down, the traditional group counseling activity can be utilized.

Another consideration when utilizing Web 2.0 applications in group counseling practices is access to computers and tablets. One solution is to have students who have their own devices use those during group sessions. Another solution is to use portable laptops from a school inventory. It is important to remember that if the group does use publicly shared computers from the school, members should be sure to clear the cache before returning the portable computers. In addition to needing computers to access the Web 2.0 applications, some of the Web 2.0 applications require plug-ins or downloadable software. For example, Tagxedo requires the use of Adobe. These plug-ins or additional software needs can be downloaded quickly right from the Web 2.0 Web site prior to the group sessions.

While most current electronic devices and computers support Web 2.0 applications, older computers may not. School counselors should check the school's computer software and the computer's ability to support the Web 2.0 applications. This equipment check should be done before the group begins. Alternative Web 2.0 applications can be sought out for computers with outdated software abilities. Furthermore, without prior permission, a district or school firewall may prohibit the use of some Web 2.0 applications. Librarians and principals often have passwords or information to bypass firewalls. Principals can give group leaders permission to unblock the use of any blocked Web 2.0 applications.

Another consideration when implementing Web 2.0 applications into group counseling practice is being overwhelmed. Transitioning to using Web 2.0 applications does not need to be an all or none decision. Using technology in just one group session and having the rest of the sessions utilize non technology-based activities is one way to lower the feeling of being overwhelmed. Incorporating technology into small group

practices can be approached slowly, one application at a time, and possibly spanning a year or more.

Finally, it is important to consider ethical practices when utilizing online applications. The current ASCA code of ethics (2010) offers few suggestions concerning the use of technology in school counseling programs. Specific guidelines about the ethical use of social media in counseling are available in the literature (Froeschle, Crews & Li, 2013; Johnson & Branson, 2012). These ethical guidelines about the use of electronic communication and social media can help inform school counselors about the use of Web 2.0 applications in groups. For example, school counselors need to monitor and protect confidential information and student work created and hosted on Web 2.0 applications. The use of privacy options should be strictly adhered to and the limits of privacy settings should be discussed with students.

Additionally, school counselors using Web 2.0 applications should safeguard students from the negative effects of unsupervised Internet use such as cyberbullying, exposure to pornography, and socializing with unknown individuals (Johnson & Branson, 2012). It is also important that school counselors closely monitor Internet use in group sessions and educate students and parents about safe Internet use outside of school. Finally, school counselors should model appropriate and responsible Internet use (Johnson & Branson, 2012).

When using technology in group counseling, it is important to include information within informed consent documents about the use of technology in the group sessions. Parent permission for students to use the Internet should be sought along with permission for student participation in the technology-based group. The authors suggest including a list of the Web 2.0 applications that will be utilized in the group setting, along with a description of the applications' privacy settings. The informed consent should also highlight that confidentiality can be safeguarded but not guaranteed. Some schools send home parent permission slips that cover student Internet use in general. School counselors should inquire how this permission slip applies to their group practices. Finally, school counselors should adhere to any school or district policies governing student Internet use.

Conclusion

Technology is a part of the lives of today's students and K–12 school systems are integrating technology into education practices. To keep pace with the 21st century student and K–12 schools, school counselors can consider ways to incorporate technology into their school counseling practices. The use of Web 2.0 applications in group counseling practices is one way school counselors can integrate technology into school counseling practices.

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