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The effect of group work on the self-efficacy of social work students

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Abstract

The oldest social work education institution of Turkey is Hacettepe University Department of Social Work. One of the most important goals of the Theory of Social Work 2 course given in this department is to improve the application skills of students. Thus, a group work is conducted with voluntary students throughout this course where the instructor functions as a facilitator. In this group work, students are expected to develop an insight and self-awareness of themselves. The present study aimed at determining the effect of group work on the self-efficacy of the 2nd grade students receiving social work education. The group work was constructed on the basis of creating awareness for them to know themselves. Therefore, the pretest-posttest comparison group design was employed. The general self-efficacy scale was used as the pretest tool and the posttest tool. Based on the said design, 46 students (12 people constituting the in-group and 34 people constituting the out-group) were included in the study. A group work lasting 6 weeks was conducted with the in-group. The out-group, on the other hand, only observed the group work, and took notes. Then the differences between the scores obtained by the in-group members before the group work and the scores obtained by them after the group work were examined, and the differences between the in-group and the out-group score averages before and after the group work were analyzed.

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1. Introduction

Group work is one of the important intervention methods in the application of social work. It involves such skills as helping one another, strengthening people, and understanding people despite differences (Gougeon, 2002), and provides various advantages including but not limited to empathy, feedback, hope-instilling, mutual assistance, normalization, socialization, social support, and approval (Toseland and Rivas, 2009). Besides such advantages, the inclusion of social work students in self-knowledge oriented group work is of big importance for the development of their insight and self-awareness.

Insight and self-awareness intended to be developed via group work may affect the self-efficacy of students. Self-efficacy is described as people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments in specific contexts (Bandura, 1977, 1986). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy, which is cognitive in nature, is open to effects and change to be introduced by knowledge. Efficacy expectations provide a gap for the prediction of formation, development, generalization, and permanence of the coping behavior. General self-efficacy, on the other hand, refers to a person's belief in his/her capability to cope with stressful and difficult life events in general (Scholz and Schwarzer, 2005). They are also defined as an individual's general confidence in view of new situations which s/he encounters in various fields and are unusual or difficult to cope with (Scholz, Gutierrez-Dona, Sud and Schwarzer, 2002).

Raising awareness and acquiring insight may be dynamics of the group work and affect one another due to in-group and out-group effects. Thus, the performance of the group work with students in a protected and safe environment may enable students to express themselves more comfortably. For that reason, awareness-raising efforts on the basis of self-knowledge may encourage students to develop more effective coping strategies. This is because; according to the research findings provided by Luszczynska et al., while high general self-efficacy beliefs were mostly associated with the selection of effective coping strategies (planning, seeking for knowledge, having a positive attitude towards the problem, etc.), low general self-efficacy beliefs were mostly related to passive coping behaviors (self-condemnation, interrupting and doing nothing behavioral, etc.) (Luszczynska et al., 2005). As can be understood from the definition of self-efficacy, individuals may cope with the different life events they encounter and produce solutions for them only by knowing themselves.

In consideration of the foregoing, the present study aimed at determining the effect of the group work constructed on the basis of self-knowledge on the self-efficacy of the 2nd grade students receiving social work education.

2. Method

The pretest-posttest comparison group design was employed in the current study. The general self-efficacy scale was used as the pretest tool and the posttest tool. Based on the said design, 46 students (12 people constituting the in-group and 34 people constituting the out-group) were included in the study. A group work lasting 6 weeks was conducted with the in-group. The out-group, on the other hand, only observed the group work, and took notes. The group sessions took averagely 90 minutes each week.

The group process was constructed as follows;

1st Session: The group members introduced themselves, and group rules were determined. In this session, the group members were asked to add a concept to their names, and the reasons for the selection of such concepts were discussed. The aims of participation in the group and the expectations from the group were touched upon.

2nd Session: The previous session was evaluated, and the sculpture & animal activity was conducted in order to reveal the perspectives of the group members on themselves. Each group member performed the animal or sculpture s/he desired. Then discussions were made on why the group members selected such animals or sculptures, what they

felt when performing such animals or sculptures, and how related such animals or sculptures were with them.

3rd Session: The previous session and its effects on the group members were evaluated. The paper pieces prepared by the group facilitator that were in different colors and forms and were not fit for any specific pattern were chosen by the group members. Then discussions were made on why the group members selected such pieces. In addition, whether they were able to choose immediately or they had difficulty in choosing was addressed. The name “group turtle” was given to the group.

4th Session: The previous session was evaluated. In this session, the group became integrated. The integrity of the group manifested itself especially when the members not participating in the group felt themselves incomplete. Thus, the “sailing” activity was conducted. Everyone performed whomever they wanted on board. Then the ship sank. This scenario questioned what the group members did and why they did so. The activity was aimed at seeing group belonging and integrity in particular.

5th session: The previous session was evaluated, and the thoughts of the group members on the group until the 5th session were discussed. This session aimed to concentrate on the importance of building confidence with the group members. Thus, the “confidence walk” activity was conducted with the group members. In this activity, two people walked in group. One of them closed his/her eyes, and the other one guided. Then they changed sides. By this means, the students were enabled to notice what guiding and walking with closed eyes made them feel.

6th session: Firstly, the group members were asked to create a sculpture with the participation of all members. Then discussions were made on why the related sculpture was created. Later the final evaluations of the group members were requested. Finally, the group members were asked to explain what they felt in the group work process, what kind of characters they noticed in themselves, and what they thought about the group as a whole.

2.1. Data collection tool

The “General Self-efficacy Scale” (GSE), which was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and whose Turkish validity and reliability study was carried out by Aypay (2010), was used in the present study in order to measure general self-efficacy. This scale has been adapted to more than 25 languages. Based on the examination of the psychometric characteristics included in its versions in more than 25 languages, it is highlighted that general self-efficacy is a universal structure (Scholz et al., 2002). In the scale, low score refers to low self-efficacy, and high score refers to high self-efficacy.

2.2. Data analysis

The differences between the scores obtained by the in-group members before the group work and the scores obtained by them after the group work were examined, and the differences between the in-group and the out-group score averages before and after the group work were analyzed.

The statistical software SPSS version 17 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 17, Chicago IL, USA) was used for calculations. All values presented as mean \pm standard deviation and mean (Maximum- Minimum) percent and frequencies. Repeated measures of analysis of variance was analysed by Mauchy's sphericity test and Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices. For comparisons of means of repeated measures Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance was used. If parametric tests (factorial design for repeated measures analysis) does not provide the preconditions, Greenhouse-Geisser (1959) correction or Huynh-Feldt (1976) correction was used for corrections to the Degrees of Freedom. The Corrected Bonferroni test was used for multiple comparisons. p values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

3. Findings and Results

This section presents the findings and the results of the current study. Table 1 presents the self-efficacy score analysis of the in-group and the out-group.

Table 1. The analysis of the in-group and out-group self-efficacy scores

	Mean ±SD Median (Min-Max)	Mean ±SD Median (Min-Max)	Interaction p Self-efficacy score*group	Difference between measurements p
	Measurement 1	Measurement 2		
In-group	30.33 ±6.26 29.5 (21-39)	38.08 ±4.3 32 (24-38)	0.540	0.025*
Out-group	29.38 ±4.6 30 (18-40)	30.58 ±4.1 31 (22-40)		0.024*
Inter-group Difference p	0.603	0.312		
Total	29.68 ±5.1 30 (18-40)	31.05 ±4.2 31 (22-40)		

*p<0.05

When the in-group and the out-group are considered, it can be said that the variation in self-efficacy scores through the group work was not statistically (interaction effect) significant (p=0.540). However, when the groups are not considered, it can be said that a statistical increase occurred in the self-efficacy scores through the group work (p<0.05).

The variation in the score can be seen better in the figure below.

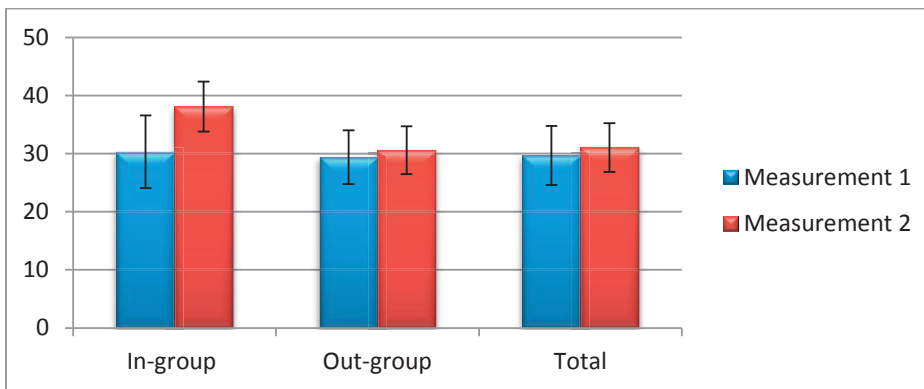


Fig. 1. Self-efficacy measurements belonging to the in-group and the out-group

According to the Fig. 1, there was a significant difference (increase) between the pretest (Measurement 1) and posttest (Measurement 2) scores. While the self-efficacy score average of the in-group increased from 30.33 to 38.08, the self-efficacy score average of the out-group rose from 29.38 to 30.58. In addition, since the score difference between the in-group and the out-group was casual, the highness of the score average of the in-group was not significant in comparison to the out-group.

To sum up, the group work constructed on the basis of raising awareness for self-knowledge affected the self-efficacy of both the in-group and the out-group, and increased the self-efficacy score average of the entire class.

Among the main objectives of the Theory of Social Work 2 course are improving the application skills of

students and making them develop insight and self-awareness through group works. In this sense, the course achieved its objective through the group work, and enabled not only the in-group members but also the entire class to make progress in terms of self-efficacy.

In the light of the research results, it is safe to say that group works on the basis of self-knowledge may have a positive effect on the self-efficacy levels of the students receiving social work education. Therefore, self-knowledge groups should be designed in social work education in particular, and it should be made sure that each student takes part in the self-knowledge group until graduation. In this way, professionals and scientists with an insight of themselves and a developed self-efficacy may be cultivated.

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