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Group Work With High School Students at Risk of School Failure: A Pilot Study

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RESEARCH

Group Work With High School Students at Risk of School Failure: A Pilot Study

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Nine ninth graders at risk of school failure participated in a supportive group counseling intervention. Students' GPA in the treatment group did not significantly improve when compared to a control group. Additionally, the treatment group completed the Critical Incidents Questionnaire (CIQ) at the conclusion of the intervention, and a follow-up questionnaire designed by the authors one year later. The findings yielded contrasting results between the quantitative data and the questionnaire data. Implications for professional school counselors and future research are discussed.

Keywords: *achievement; at-risk students; group work; school counselors*

The literature on group work in the school setting at first glance is robust and shows the value of group counseling for students (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2007; Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Brannigan, 2007; Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman & Goodman, 2001; Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Prout & Prout, 1998; Riva & Haub, 2004; Webb & Brigman, 2007). For the most part, research on group counseling for children and adolescents has been conducted in school settings, and more groups for this age group are offered in schools than in other settings (Corey & Corey, 2006).

Group counseling is often used to work with students who are experiencing life stressors and/or difficulties in the classroom (Gladding, 2003). Researchers have concluded that working with students in a group counseling setting is a viable way to assist those who are not achieving to their fullest potential academically and who may be

experiencing emotional or behavioral issues (Bemak et al., 2005; Shechtman, Glat, Fos, & Flasher, 1996; Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

There appears to be considerable variation in the degree and type of implementation of group work within the school setting (Akos & Milsom, 2007). Akos and Milsom argued that more theoretical and conceptual research, evaluation and outcome studies, and sound information on strategies for implementing and facilitating groups in school are needed. They postulated that these factors are necessary to strengthen the emerging body of group work research and practice in schools.

The current study describes the implementation and evaluation of a group counseling intervention with high school students at high risk of school failure. The intervention is based on the premise that group counseling for adolescents within the school setting, when facilitated properly, can provide a stable environment during potentially difficult developmental years that students may experience during high school (Grant & Berkovitz, 1999; Phillips & Phillips, 1992; Veach & Gladding, 2007). Through group work, adolescents have opportunities to realize that what they are experiencing is being experienced by others (Portman & Portman, 2002), therefore recognizing the universality of their experience with their peers.

However, the manner in which the group is facilitated may determine whether or not the group is influenced more by the interaction with group members or other factors such as the group counseling curriculum and strategies. For instance, Schonberg and Tellerman (1997) used a highly structured group intervention to work with at-risk adolescents to identify and solve personal problems and to help other group members resolve their issues. The program included 10 steps for acknowledging and handling problems. The authors noted that the students were most successful when they discussed harmless and predictable adolescent behavior. Conversely, with more deeply rooted problems, the students struggled with the structure of the group due to its narrow focus and adherence to the group counseling curriculum. The authors acknowledged that there were opportunities to process the group interactions, but that their goals established prior to the onset of the group prevented them from doing so. They concluded that future interventions would be more balanced with sufficient attention given to processing interactions along with delivering information.

Rice and Meyer (1994) conducted a structured group counseling intervention with adolescents. They reported data on the treatment components and descriptive information about a psycho-educational group program to prevent depression in adolescents. Their participants were a total of 145 students in the treatment and control groups from two middle schools and one junior high school. Students in the treatment group participated in the group counseling program during the

school day, while the control group participated in other activities available to all students within their respective schools. These authors reported a high degree of treatment fidelity when implementing the program based on leader reports of adherence to the protocol. Also, they found mixed results regarding the effectiveness of the program, with some group activities (which they did not identify) being more successful than others. Their work did not provide sufficient detail about the actual structure used in the program. Nonetheless, they recommended that group process dynamics be used to increase the potential impact on outcome data (e.g., grades and attendance).

In an earlier study, the effectiveness of a group counseling prevention program for ninth graders using a semi-structured behavioral approach to address maladjustment (i.e., academic failure, truancy, and interpersonal difficulties with peers and teachers) was conducted in a high school setting (Maher & Barbrack, 1982). At the beginning of the group, students were assisted by the school counselor and other group members to identify behaviors that interfered with academic achievement. Students were prompted to "think about" those "behaviors" that seemed to result in their doing "poorly" in school which they could correct, and to consider the problems that impeded their addressing those behaviors. The counseling sessions included a 5-step approach which was presented to the students as a series of questions that follows (a) What are my problems in school with respect to succeeding in school? (b) What alternatives are available to help me eliminate the problems? (c) What is my plan for getting rid of them? (d) Am I following through on my plan or should it be changed? and (e) Is my plan working or do I need another one?

Following this intervention, students participating in the groups had increased school attendance and grade point average (GPA) compared to a group of ninth graders who only received the school's routine counseling services. Furthermore, the number of disciplinary referrals and referrals for special education decreased for the treatment students. One recommendation from this study was for future counseling groups to include a control group that is not exposed to any counseling services and to compare these students with the treatment group exposed to the group counseling intervention.

A more recent study by Bauer, Sapp, and Johnson (2000) compared structured, cognitive behavioral group counseling to a less structured supportive group counseling intervention for rural high school students struggling to overcome low achievement. Their definition of low achievement included having a GPA of 2.0 or lower and having disciplinary referrals for detention and/or suspensions. The results of their study were mixed. The less structured supportive counseling groups reduced the number of detentions and suspensions, whereas

the highly structured cognitive group approach increased students' academic self concept. Their work suggested that future investigations should continue to identify which type of group is more beneficial for adolescents.

Emphasizing the use of group process, Bemak, Chung, and Siroskey-Sabdo (2005) developed the Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) approach. They conducted a group counseling intervention with high school students with no pre-determined curriculum. Members of the group were African American females failing out of school and with whom prior interventions, including group interventions, had been unsuccessful. This group was described as highly unstructured yet had clearly defined goals for academic improvement. The authors speculated that the students benefited academically and socially from this intervention because of the major focus on processing the group dynamics and the issues that arose within the sessions. One suggestion for future inquiry was to acquire quantitative data that confirmed the positive observations noted at the conclusion of the intervention.

The design of the group investigated in the current study is based on Bemak et al.'s (2005) Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) approach that emphasizes process groups to support and improve academic achievement and Bauer et al.'s (2000) supportive view that group counseling can also be an educational experience where students can learn and practice positive interactions that will in turn aid them in becoming more successful in school. The question we sought to answer was: Would the students participating in the supportive counseling group achieve higher GPAs than the students in the control group who were not exposed to any group treatment? Additionally, how would the students in the treatment group describe their experiences following the groups at the conclusion of the intervention as well as at a one year follow-up?

METHOD

Participants

Students. There were nine ninth graders in the treatment group. Five were males and four were females. The gender and ethnicity of the treatment group were as follows: two White males, one Black male, one Asian Male, one Latino male, two White females, one Black female, and one Latino female. In the control group there were also nine ninth grade students that were matched to the treatment group

based on failing grades and teacher recommendation. Students were selected for the group based on the following two factors:

1. During their first nine weeks of high school they received at least two F's in any of the following core classes: Math, Science, Language Arts, or History.
2. Their names were submitted by teachers asked to identify students struggling academically whom they believed could benefit from this group based on their understanding of the group's goals.

Group leaders. All 10 group sessions were co-facilitated by one Black male professional school counselor and one White male University professor. The school counselor had experience leading groups in schools with elementary students and the professor had considerable group experience with children, adolescents, and adults as well as experience training and preparing others to implement group work. The co-facilitators met before and after each groupsession to discuss the progress of the group. These meetings were important for evaluating the group sessions, creating a cohesive co-facilitation team, providing an opportunity to discuss different perspectives, brainstorming ideas, and providing supervision and training for the school counselor.

Measurement

Grade point average (GPA). The group counseling intervention was evaluated by comparing the grade point averages of students in the treatment and those of control groups pre- and post-intervention. The pre-GPAs were collected at the end of the first quarter and prior to the group's commencement. The post-GPAs were collected at the end of the third quarter at the conclusion of the group. The GPAs were also compared again the last quarter of the following school year.

Critical incidents questionnaire (CIQ). Participants completed the Critical Incidents Questionnaire (CIQ) (Kivlighan & Goldfine, 1991) during the final group session. The CIQ was used to gather a description of each member's perspective while identifying the most salient factors that may have influenced the group's effectiveness. The CIQ prompt is as follows:

Of the events which occurred in these group sessions, which one do you feel was the most important to/for you personally? Describe the event: what actually took place, the group members involved, and their reactions. Why was this important to you? What did you learn from this event?

There also was a one year follow-up questionnaire created by the authors to gather a reflection of the participants' experiences. The format of the follow-up questionnaire was open-ended to allow the students to share and acknowledge aspects of the group experience and any impact they felt the group had on them during the past year.

Procedures

The students were randomly selected for the treatment and control groups based on their ninth grade team status. More specifically, the 180 ninth graders at the school where the intervention took place were divided into a Black team and a Gold team by the administrators for scheduling and transitioning purposes. From the 180 students, 36 qualified to participate in the group, based on the established criteria. Teachers completed a brief form providing information about student classroom behavior and academic performance to help with student selection.

From the 36 students, 5 students from the Black team and 4 students from the Gold team were randomly selected as the treatment group and 4 students from the Black and 5 from the Gold team respectively were randomly selected for the control group. The students not selected to participate in the current intervention (including the control group) were waitlisted to receive services the following semester.

Once the treatment group was selected, they were pre-screened by both group leaders using an open ended interviewing style. The purpose of the initial screening was to obtain student verbal assent to participate, gain a commitment to join the group, to establish openness, good fit, and willingness to address issues initiated by the students, and to provide information for the students to invite their parents to an orientation meeting. The orientation meeting was used to describe the group counseling program and to provide a forum where the participants' parental consent could be solicited. The group counseling intervention took place after the first nine weeks of school and continued once a week for ten weeks until early spring. After the last group session, students completed the CIQ. The following school year, the students in the treatment group were invited to answer the one year follow-up questions relating to their perception of long term benefits and their recollection of the group experience. Institutional review board (IRB) approval at the university level was not solicited because the group counseling intervention being offered was covered under the local school district's policy on appropriate school counseling services.

Treatment Procedures

The group counseling intervention was described as a supportive counseling group (Bauer et al., 2000) and Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (Bemak et al., 2005). The premise was that students have the most opportunity to change within a supportive environment in which the group leaders show genuine care, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding. These factors stem from person-centered counseling theory. Intervention techniques used included active listening, reflection of feelings, meaning clarification, and summarization. Additionally, the group leaders facilitated group feedback, peer support, and an openness to challenge peers. Oftentimes the group discussions were initiated by the group members and related to negative experiences within the school and their home.

The group leaders cultivated trust among students in the group. This was particularly important given that trusting and genuine relationships may sometimes be lacking during adolescence. Some group leadership strategies used were adopted from the work of Grant and Berkovitz (1999). These included (a) not being shocked by students' sometimes exaggerated stories, (b) not judging the members, (c) helping students explore issues in their lives, (d) listening to their point of view, (e) showing sincere interest, and (f) knowing when to allow silence to provide time for introspection and opportunities for new issues to surface. Furthermore, the group leaders attended to the developmental nature of the group as a whole while attending to the individual group members' development (Corey & Corey, 2006; Grant & Berkovitz, 1999). Thus, the group leaders were cognizant of the multiple facets of the group "process" and the benefits therein when leading the group.

A SUMMARY OF THE TEN GROUP SESSIONS

Table 1 presents general themes and issues the students brought up during the group sessions. It is important to note that during the first meeting, the group facilitators shared with the students the group's purpose which was to improve academic achievement. However from that point on, the structure of the group was open in order to ensure that the issues discussed were determined by the students, similar to the EGAS approach (Bemak et al., 2005). The issues that emerged early in group's development and continuing throughout the group's lifespan represented current and pressing concerns illustrative of things the students were dealing with in their lives. This approach

Table 1   Overview of Session Events

Session #	Student Generated Topics	Sample of Critical Incidents
1	Why students were attending the group Confidentiality	Discussion about grades, family dynamics, safety, boundaries, and culture
2	Race, ethnicity, culture, House arrest, cursing, and discord between home and school	Discussions about racial differences amongst group members, use of profanity within group, and defining group boundaries
3	Group is boring and why do we talk about personal problems	Giving advice to other students having academic challenges A student brought brownies promised in earlier session and cohesion increased
4	Myspace.com, racial and cultural issues, and religion	Someone exclaimed "This is fun!" Member shared they ceased a friendship due to friend's drug use
5	Conflict, family dynamics, and Group termination	Student's self disclosure about mother's depression Another shared about father's alcoholism.
6	Myspace.com, video games, family issues, changes in attitude towards school and group termination	Student challenged another about the time spent on video games taking away from school work
7	Group benefits, possibility of group ending prematurely due to school wide testing schedule	Students role played discussion ideas for school counselor to use with principal Students wrote letters to be used as evidence
8	Group termination, relationships, trust, and intimacy	Discussion about school counselor's successful meeting with principal and learning that teachers also provided positive feedback about the group on behalf of the students
9	Drug use, school work, and appropriate relationships	Student disclosed being three months clean from using drugs
10	Termination, social networks outside of group, and discussions that this group should be offered to others	Reminiscing about group sessions Discussing changes they have seen in others

was chosen because a more structured framework may have interfered with the students' ability to talk about these difficult situations (Schonberg & Tellerman, 1997).

One consideration noted during early group sessions was the evolution of the cohesion amongst the students that occurred quickly and was sustained throughout the group's duration. Typically, ice breakers and other engaging activities are used to connect students to the group and group process. However, none of these were used and a simple comment such as, "What would you like to discuss today?" was posed by one of the counselors each session and the students would begin in no particular order discussing whatever came to mind.

Sometimes there were silent moments. When this occurred the group leaders intentionally allowed the students a chance to reflect (Grant & Berkovitz, 1999). This strategy was negotiated by the group facilitators after one of the earlier group sessions and was helpful in illustrating to the students that they had the ability to influence the direction of the group sessions.

Termination issues surfaced midway through the group. In particular there was a discussion about the group possibly ending prematurely due to statewide testing responsibilities. However, this was resolved due to the advocacy efforts of the school counselor with the students' input and teachers' support. Neither the group leaders nor the students were aware that the school principal had asked the teachers' their thoughts about the group's influence on the students. The students seemed encouraged to know that they fought to keep the group going and had support from their teachers.

The last session the facilitators brought in food from a local sandwich shop. The students ate, joked, and shared feelings of camaraderie. They also completed the CIQ while reminiscing about the meetings that took place throughout the last ten weeks. Some discussions included the changes each of them had made and whether or not a group like this would continue in the future either for them or other students. Additionally, a discussion about social networks outside of the group occurred.

RESULTS

Critical Incidents Questionnaire (CIQ)

The students shared through the CIQ that the most important thing about the group was being able to express any and everything and knowing that others shared similar experiences. When asked

"What was the most important event?" group members responded, "discussions about homework," "talking about ways to be successful," "talking about how to keep our meetings going even though the principal said we couldn't meet anymore because we had to practice our statewide standardize tests," "being able to discuss personal issues which helped us focus on our work," and "expressing personal feelings that were held in inside." A year later when asked the same question during the follow-up the response was similar. Members shared that, "we were allowed to express our true feelings," "I had trouble and it helped me out," "it helped me realize what I was doing was wrong," "meeting helped me understand many things," "it helped me focus on homework," "the group helped me clear my mind," and "the group helped me improve my grades, even though I didn't think it would."

At the conclusion of the group, students were also asked about what they learned from the group experience. They reported that they grew to be more trusting with others and now understood how important it was to share feelings rather than holding them in. It was significant for group members to realize that peers shared many similar concerns and problems. The students also reported that the group helped them clear their minds and subsequently focus on classes and get better grades. This coincided with an understanding that it is permissible to not want to do some things (such as homework) but that one can do them anyway because of the impact on one's future. Finally, some students reported a better understanding of being "kind," and more organized.

In addition to the CIQ students were asked, "Did the group help you improve grades?" Seven of the students responded with "yes" and two with "a little." When asked, "What were the most important ways the group was beneficial?" responses included, "being able to trust others and to be honest in what we were talking about." Other responses included, "talking separate from school work," and "expressing ourselves" surfaced as benefits. Comments about the group leaders included, that "it was nice to have the group leaders ask questions and not just tell us what to do" and "talking and being able to relate to each other and discussing problems no matter how bad they were without being judged" was "important" and "helpful." Additionally, they expressed, "other students helped us handle and come up with solutions to our problems." Some students mentioned how the group provided an opportunity to "let off steam about school problems" along with "clearing my mind to solve problems." Finally, the conversations involving "talking together" and "giving great advice" and "sharing our opinions and feeling helpful to others" arose as salient issues.

One Year Follow-Up

The following school year during the spring semester students were asked the questions below. The first question was whether or not the students still remembered the group meetings, and if so, what did they most recall. They were overwhelmingly positive in recalling the group. Some responses about what they remembered were "the in-depth discussions," "ability to share our opinions of how to help others," and ideas of "how to help ourselves."

Another question was about any other things that came to mind regarding the group counseling experience. Some of the students mentioned that the group was "comfortable" as well as "knowing that others were going through the same thing is something that I remember." Also the "group leaders" and "the food" were mentioned.

Responding to the question, "Last year students mentioned that the group helped them solve problems. Do you believe that the group has had a long-term effect on you and helps you solve problems today?" All of the respondents said "yes." When asked if the group had a long term effect on their school performance, five of the students felt that it did. Some shared that the group "provided a sense of urgency to do better in school" and "gave me specific ideas to organize my time." Other students commented that the group "kept me concentrating" and "I am still doing much better in Math, and English." However, one student acknowledged doing better in school but, "only while the group took place." Two students responded that they were "not sure" whether the group helped them do better in school in the long run.

Asked if the group helped students "complete homework more often, study harder for tests, make a commitment to study more, not miss school, come to school on time, or think twice before they got into an argument or disagreement with another student again," five students responded with a "yes," stating that group feedback "helped me control my anger," and "get along better with parents." Another student shared that "I continue to do my homework," while someone else responded, "I tried some of the ideas that we talked about such as, getting help to become sure of what was expected of me." One student commented "I think twice before getting into a fight," and "I get along better with my mom and study more." When asked about grade improvement, six students said "yes," two responded with "my grades are the same," and one admitted "not really."

Another question related to continuing to be "focused" in school. Some of the group members responded with a "yes," while one said, "I still need to focus more," and three of the students admitted "no." The final question was about their recommendations for future groups with other students. Their suggestions included "bring another group

and group leader to our school" and "please don't change anything." Further they recommended that the group leaders "keep asking questions" continue to "listen to what's going on in our lives." Also, keep being "well organized and do the groups all year round." Finally, one student urged us to "keep stressing confidentiality."

Grade Point Average

Means and standard deviations were computed for the students in the treatment and control groups for total GPA (which included only the core classes such as Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies) for pre- and post-intervention. Differences in pre-test scores between treatment and control groups were analyzed using independent samples t-tests to establish if there were any significant differences prior to the group counseling intervention. None of the differences were statistically significant. Therefore in order to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between treatment group and control group scores on post-intervention for total GPA, independent samples t-tests were computed using an alpha level of .05. There were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups in the students' GPA either following the group intervention or at the one year follow up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL
SCHOOL COUNSELORS

The results present an interesting contrast between self reports and statistical findings. The feedback gathered from the CIQ highlighted that the students described their experiences within the group counseling intervention very favorably, noting that the ability to say anything and everything was influential in their development. Furthermore, the students provided feedback that suggested the process orientation had a positive impact on their group counseling experience. Thus an important implication for school counselors working with high school students is for there to be a willingness when leading a group to allow the students the liberty to initiate their most pressing concerns. In the present study, this was instrumental in the students' enthusiasm to engage in the group. Additionally, the self-disclosure that surfaced from the flexible group format appeared to encourage all members to share deep personal problems as well as to challenge unwanted behaviors (Bemak et al., 2005).

The unstructured nature of the group counseling intervention seemed to have provided the students with a venue in which they

could explore extremely personal issues related to school and home life. Consequently, students were able to learn that others were sharing similar experiences (Portman & Portman, 2002). Thus, it is also important that school counselors conducting groups process issues most relevant to the students. In other words, the school counselor should provide students an optimal opportunity to share their struggles with their peers and give time to explore, reflect, and find meaning in these situations (Corey & Corey, 2006). In doing so, the students may become accountable, supportive, and empowered to make the right choices in their home and school life (Bemak et al., 2005).

Although this flexibility and willingness was present for the students within the current group counseling intervention, the students in the intervention group's GPA did not improve more than the control group. There are a number of possible explanations, with the most important being the small sample size. A power analysis using G-Power 3.05 (Buchner, Erdfelder, Faul, & Lang, 2006) revealed that a sample size of 42 would be needed to detect a large effect, and 134 to detect a small effect. The sample in the current study did not approach the size necessary to detect significant differences. In addition, several other factors may have affected the outcome: (a) perhaps more than a 10 session group intervention would be needed, (b) maybe the expression of challenges and difficulties in group cannot directly result in improving academic achievement (Brown & Trusty, 2005), although the students' sense of belonging and cohesion may be increased, and (c) perhaps factors associated with achievement (e.g., attendance, class participation, turning in homework) cannot be influenced by this type of group counseling intervention.

A constructive aspect of the group counseling intervention was the nature of the group cohesion that occurred. This could have stemmed from the group leaders' intentional efforts to allow the students to be comfortable wherever they were within the context of the group. Whatever the reason, this cohesion added depth to the group and allowed student concerns to emerge early on.

The group was also diverse in terms of race and ethnicity and this could have had a positive effect on the development of the group. The diversity between the group leaders and the students was not explored, but racial discussions spanning how individuals identify themselves to conflict within the school surfaced. This too added a rich dimension to the group that should not go unnoticed. However, the impact of these factors on the group was not explored.

Another implication for school counselors interested in facilitating groups with high school students is that it is important to gather outcome data with a qualitative component (Grant & Berkovitz, 1999; Riva & Haub, 2004). In light of the difficulty obtaining large enough

sample sizes to establish significant differences between the treatment and control groups' GPA following the intervention, the manner in which the students described their group experiences and peer and family relationships was positive and promising. This descriptive component provided additional information about the potential impact of the group counseling intervention.

Nonetheless, the authors suggest that discretion occur when interpreting these findings due to the small sample size. Moreover, this study should be viewed as a prelude to future research. However, we stress that school counselors should take into consideration being flexible and open to enhancing the group experience by limiting overly structured group counseling interventions (Schonberg & Tellerman, 1997).

Even taking into account the conflicting findings of this study, it is necessary to replicate this type of group counseling intervention with more empirical data and a larger sample size (Brigham & Campbell, 2003). Another limitation of this study was that the students in the control group were only compared by their GPA. To better utilize the comparison group, students and their teachers could complete surveys describing their behavior and attitudes both pre- and post-intervention. Another area that should be attended to in future research is gender. Gender was not raised as a salient issue by the students. It is possible that having two male group facilitators posed challenges for the female students whereas the male students could readily identify with the counselors. This being said, matching group members' race, ethnicity, and/or sex to similar leadership factors might be more appropriate but not always feasible (Bemak et al., 2005).

Another potential limitation is the use of GPA as a measure of achievement. With the subjectivity of grades and the flexibility of teachers to determine grades, perhaps more valid and reliable instruments measuring variables that correlate with achievement could strengthen this line of research. It is also desirable to have longer intervals between pre- and post-measures that are assessing overall achievement.

Future research could be done in such a way to provide a structure/format so that other school counselors could replicate this group. The study could be set up in a manner that shows what to do, what topics to allow for discussion, and specific ways to process the interactions in the group. Further, a case study illustrating the principles of the EGAS framework and Bauer's supportive approach would contribute significantly to the field of group work in general and for practitioners working with high school students in particular (Janice Delucia-Waack, ASGW president, personal communication, April 14, 2008).

SUMMARY

Based on the effectiveness and efficiency of group counseling in a school setting, the primary goal of this intervention was to facilitate a pilot group counseling program serving students who were the most at risk for academic failure. In particular, we targeted students in ninth grade who were initially at risk of failing and potentially dropping out of school based on their academic performance during the first nine weeks and the concerns that their teachers were experiencing. The group counseling intervention's purpose was to break the cycle of failure, despite one's ethnic, racial, and socio-economic status with the ultimate goal of improving academic achievement. Further, we wanted to focus on the issues students would raise that may impact their school performance. This group counseling intervention provided an opportunity for students to experience a supportive, collaborative, and safe learning environment, discuss and resolve personal and social problems that were interfering with their academic success, and develop healthy connections with other students, their own families, and indirectly the larger school community.

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