

# Mixed-method comparison of the impact of service-learning on students' learning and course-related perceptions

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## Abstract

In the past eight years, EDPS 500: Group Counseling Theories and Techniques has been taught (by the same professor) four times *without* a service-learning component and four times *with* a service-learning component (the BRIDGE). An evaluation of the impact of service-learning was performed through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from students who had taken the course. Compared with participants who did not have a service-learning component, BRIDGE participants rated the class to be more memorable, practical, and personally rewarding. These participants also indicated having more comfort with death and dying-related clinical situations. Participation in service learning was directly or indirectly referred to as useful by 100% of BRIDGE participants and spontaneously noted as a desirable course change by 25% of the other participants.

## Introduction

### Course Purpose

Provide a theoretical and experiential overview of the basic elements of providing counseling in a group context and promote development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for competent group practice.

### Course Format

- 1<sup>st</sup> half: Focus on building solid foundation of knowledge (lectures, class discussions, group exercises)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half: Students serve as co-facilitators of the BRIDGE

### The BRIDGE (By Remembering I Develop and Grow)

- 8-session psychoeducational support program for bereaved families
- Collaboration with school corporation, with school counselors serving as supervisors
- Based on theory and research
- One evening a week at a local elementary school
  - Pre-session supervision
  - Dinner
  - Support groups (separate groups for adults, teens, pre-teens, and children)
  - Family meetings
  - Post-session supervision

### Service-Learning Specific Objectives

- Demonstrate awareness of the personal and professional benefits of engaging in community service
- Acquire theoretical and empirical knowledge of grief and bereavement and an understanding of how the experience and expression of grief is affected by individual factors such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity
- Recognize the idiosyncratic nature of grief and bereavement
- Exhibit comfort with discussing grief and bereavement issues with group members

## Method

### Participants

Table 1.

Participant demographics.

Demographic	BRIDGE		Control		One-way ANOVA	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	F (df)	<i>p</i>
Race					0.34	0.565
Asian American	1	7.7	0	0.0		
European American	11	84.6	12	100.0		
Choose not to respond	1	7.7	0	0.0		
Sex					0.61	0.445
Female	11	84.6	11	91.7		
Male	1	7.7	1	8.3		
Choose not to respond	1	7.7	0	0.0		

  

Demographic	BRIDGE		Control		Independent T-test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	t (df)	<i>p</i>
Age	29.2	5.1	31.2	4.1	- 1.95	0.063
Death losses	5.2	3.2	6.5	3.7	- 2.06	0.051
Group sessions led	55.0	39.9	66.3	33.7	- 1.284	0.180

### Materials and Procedures

#### Quantitative Measures

- Group Leader Self-Efficacy scale (
- Civic Attitudes scale (
- Counseling Situations Questionnaire
- Single-item assessments
  - Memorable, informative, practical, academically challenging, useful, personally rewarding, and interesting

#### Qualitative Measures

- Open-ended questions focused on perceptions of course usefulness, suggestions for change, and preparation for future group work

Potential participants who had taken EPDS 500 were sent a recruitment email that included the link to an online survey. The BRIDGE program was not mentioned anywhere in the survey.

### Quantitative

Table 2.

Selected quantitative results.

Analyses	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial η<sup>2</sup></i>
<b>MANOVA</b>				
All dependent measures, with age as a covariate	3.01	11,12	.035	.73
<b>ANOVA</b>				
<b>Course Evaluation</b>				
Memorable	11.37	1,22	.003	.34
Practical	6.21	1,22	.021	.22
Personally rewarding	17.44	1,22	.000	.44
<b>Student Learning</b>				
Comfort with death and dying-related concepts	9.05	1,22	.006	.29

### Qualitative

All BRIDGE participants made either direct or indirect reference to their service-learning experience in response to the prompt about course usefulness. Those who took the course without the service-learning component indicated that they would have changed the course by adding more “hands-on” experience. One fourth of the non-BRIDGE participants actually mentioned wishing they could have been involved with the BRIDGE.

## Discussion

The results of the present investigation suggest that graduate students in school counseling and counseling psychology perceived the addition of a service-learning component into a group counseling course as positive and useful. Consistent with the added course objective of increasing comfort with death and dying situations, students who were involved with the BRIDGE did display a greater level of comfort in clinical situations involving death and dying issues than did their non-BRIDGE peers. These findings highlight the power of service-learning in providing hands-on experiences that impact student learning in areas even beyond basic course concepts.