

Using Pair Counseling to Improve the Cost-Effectiveness of College Career Counseling



The Professional Counselor
Volume 3, Issue 2, Pages 82–92
<http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org>
© 2013 NBCC, Inc. and Affiliates
doi:10.15241/mcm.3.2.82

Mary-Catherine McClain
James P. Sampson

As the demand for career counseling services grows, the need for accountability rises, and the availability of funding decreases, it becomes more critical that practitioners utilize cost-effective interventions and alternative forms of treatment. One option for improving access to all clients while concurrently reducing costs involves using approaches based on collaboration between clients. Pair counseling, a brief intervention based on pairing two individuals of opposing orientations, can be implemented to improve access, promote social justice, and enhance the overall delivery of career services. This article further examines how career theory can be translated into actual practice. Implications for program development and future research are addressed.

Keywords: career counseling, pair counseling, cost-effective interventions, alternative treatments, brief intervention, social justice, program development

Career counselors are struggling to find more cost-effective, accessible interventions while simultaneously dealing with budget cuts and demands for accountability. As noted by Sampson, Dozier, and Colvin (2011), the nature of interventions (e.g., group counseling, workshops) and practitioners (e.g., teachers, counselors) are two key factors associated with cost. While specialized resources and individual counseling may be necessary for clients lacking readiness for decision-making, it is important to consider alternatives when assisting clients with higher levels of readiness or proficient decision-making skills. When level of client readiness is assessed and the appropriate service delivery option identified (e.g., individual, group, self-help), accessibility will be maximized, costs will be minimized, and practitioners will be better prepared to meet the heightened demand for services.

The purpose of this article is to provide a rationale for implementing pair counseling to maximize the number of individuals who can receive career assistance, while concurrently enhancing the cost-effectiveness and overall quality of career service delivery. This article examines career counseling and how career theory has been translated into practice, the effectiveness and relative costs of interventions utilized in career counseling, and suggestions for using pair counseling and evaluating its efficacy.

Career Development, Theory and Practice

Career counseling provides individuals with critical tools for improving self-understanding, occupational knowledge and career exploration behavior in order to set appropriate vocational goals. It also helps individuals meet their aspirations by identifying a sense of life purpose and direction. The practice of career counseling includes a unique history of more than 90 years, which incorporates principles related to counseling and career theory (Super, 1992).

Mary-Catherine McClain is a predoctoral intern at Johns Hopkins University Counseling Center. James P. Sampson, NCC, NCCC, is the Mode L. Stone Distinguished Professor of Counseling and Career Development, Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Administration, and Co-Director, Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development, College of Education at Florida State University. Correspondence can be addressed to Mary-Catherine McClain, 3003 North Charles Street, Suite S-200, Baltimore, MD 21218, mcmclain@gmail.com.

Career theory plays an important role in improving the overall practice of career counseling. For example, the theory provides a basis for selecting interventions and information to effectively deliver services (Brown, 2002). Research conducted by Parsons (1909) during his work with adolescents serves as one factor that increased support for career development and interventions among school educators. Parsons emphasized the importance of self-knowledge (e.g., abilities) and knowledge about the world of work. Similarly, Strong (1927) highlighted the importance of connecting student interests to occupations, and Holland (1973) advocated finding occupational environments that were congruent with individual personality types.

Since the early 1980s, career theories and counseling roles have expanded from a strictly vocational emphasis toward a more holistic picture to meet the diverse and cultural needs of all clientele (Lee & Johnston, 2001; Parmer & Rush, 2003). Due to the rapid transformation of social and economic structures in the 21st century, career counselors have recognized the importance of utilizing dynamic interventions and new service delivery models that have emerged in response to this challenging context (Amundson, 2006). While the field of career theory has experienced considerable growth, research suggests the translation of theory into practice remains inadequate and inconsistent (Miller & Brown, 2005). Pair counseling (discussed in depth later in this article) represents one dynamic, holistic and brief-service delivery approach that could be used to help college students make more effective career decisions through the development of enhanced self-knowledge and occupational knowledge.

Interventions, Efficacy and Costs

In light of recent accountability requirements and reductions in state funding, practitioners are experiencing increased pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services on client outcomes (Wampold, Lichtenberg, & Waehler, 2002). Furthermore, continued funding is highly associated with providing data on the efficacy of career interventions. The current literature suggests that career counseling interventions are effective and promote career development in clients receiving services (Whiston, 2002). Similarly, a meta-analysis performed by Hughes and Gration (2006) found that career decision-making behaviors, career-related knowledge and career maturity improved following exposure to career services. To continue examining the effectiveness of career counseling interventions, it is critical that policies are implemented in which practitioners are allocated adequate financial resources and time for evaluation purposes. Equally important is developing and testing more cost-effective models of service delivery, which ultimately promotes social justice.

Social Justice

Common themes within social justice include advocating for equal access and distribution of resources in society for both underprivileged and more fortunate individuals (Sampson et al., 2011). As mentioned above, the costs related to providing interventions may serve as one factor limiting the accessibility of services—making such costs a social justice issue. For example, individual counseling is more expensive and time consuming than other modalities, yet it appears to be the most widely accepted and used practice (Sampson et al., 2011). As the demand for services grows and the need for accountability rises, it becomes even more critical that practitioners are proactive and utilize alternative forms of treatment. One option for improving access while concurrently reducing costs involves using approaches based on collaboration between clients (Sampson et al., 2011). The following section explores the effectiveness of utilizing two nontraditional forms of counseling within the field of higher education as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the approach.

Counseling Modalities

Some career counselors have shifted focus to helping clients through collaborative techniques rather than implementing interventions that assist individuals independently (Thrift & Amundson, 2005). For instance, Lee and Johnston (2001) argued that the future success of career services and work performance is dependent upon effective collaboration, interdependence and relationships skills in which clients function as co-learners. In order to create more flexible interpersonal arrangements and reduced time constraints when providing

support, guidance and information to clients, researchers in a variety of fields have developed creative treatment alternatives.

Peer Tutoring

Over the past two decades, research (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002) in peer tutoring has increased dramatically due to the method's economic advantages (e.g., teaching larger numbers of students), political benefits (e.g., facilitating egalitarian thinking), social gains (e.g., improving interpersonal skills), and positive outcomes (e.g., promoting empowerment). Furthermore, students become active learners, receive immediate feedback, achieve greater commitment, and experience increased motivation (Schunk, 1987). For example, Maxwell (1990) showed that peer tutoring and counseling improved academic achievement, increased confidence, and lowered student anxiety levels among tutees. Likewise, Topping, Watson, Jarvis, and Hill (1996) found that students in dyadic reciprocal tutoring groups reported less stress, higher learning and more positive self-concepts when compared to a randomly assigned control group. The mentoring or tutoring relationship also allows for direct assistance with career and professional development, while it concurrently supports emotional and psychological growth (Jacobi, 1991). On the other hand, peer tutoring does have disadvantages: training students to serve as teachers consumes extensive time, and the quality of interaction may be poor if students are not matched appropriately (McDonnell, 1994). Additionally, students may give incorrect information when not under the supervision of a professional.

Collaborative Learning

One form of instructional design typically utilized within university contexts is collaborative learning (Yang, 2006). Specifically, students actively work together in groups of two or more to complete learning tasks and solve problems. More recently, dyads or pairs of students have served as the primary functional unit for collaborative learning. Slavin (1996) advocated that individuals learn better as other peers prompt metacognition, facilitate participation in cognitive activities, and provide validation. Additionally, diffusion of responsibility is minimized because only two students are working together. Improving access to interventions and reducing costs are further benefits of implementing collaborative-based approaches. On the other hand, without the role of a more advanced facilitator, students may experience difficulty completing complex tasks or have insufficient resources to solve problems.

In summary, peer tutoring and collaborative learning represent different modalities with similar underlying theoretical foundations that can be applied when assisting college students with career decisions. However, one must consider a number of significant limitations prior to use. For example, one shortcoming of each approach is the failure to directly consider developmental levels and cognitive abilities of respective clients (Horton, 2008). Pair counseling could be considered as a more cost-effective approach that incorporates strengths found in the above two modalities as well as includes interventions fostering developmental and cognitive growth under the supervision of a trained practitioner.

Pair Counseling

Pair counseling is a structured, short-term developmental intervention in which two persons of opposing intrapersonal orientations (e.g., shy versus aggressive) are matched in a counseling relationship and experience dyadic interactions within a secure environment, guided by a trained practitioner (Karcher, 2002). Pair counseling also incorporates principles of developmental psychology, play therapy and social psychology. Additionally, it is holistic, contextual, and serves as a potential preventive framework for college students seeking career counseling services and resources. Finally, it includes assumptions found in the above modalities (e.g., learning is active, depends on rich contexts, and is inherently social) and allows pairs to function under the guidance, structure and supervision of a trained counselor. However, pair counseling has not been empirically tested within a career center setting or with college/adult populations. Instead, the majority of research investigating the effectiveness of pair counseling has been conducted using children and adolescents

in residential or juvenile settings (e.g., middle schools, prisons) (Selman & Schultz, 1990). In the subsequent paragraphs, the theoretical foundation and respective evaluation outcomes are addressed followed by a description of core techniques, roles of the counselor, and assessment measures used in practice. It also should be noted that this article first examines pair counseling with children, and later explores how it can be used when serving adult populations seeking career services.

Theoretical Orientation

The mechanisms of change by which pair counseling occurs can be broken down into three theoretical categories: social perspective taking, interpersonal negotiation and interpersonal orientation. More than 50 years ago, Piaget (1965) proposed that peers and supportive relationships are critical for appropriate development. Additionally, researchers suggest that parents, educators and professionals cannot provide these friendships in the same manner or quality that peers are able to achieve (Selman, Levitt, & Schultz, 1997). Selman (1980) and his colleagues developed a model of interpersonal understanding based on the above rationale, defined as the ability to “understand social situations in terms of the multiple perspectives of the individuals involved” (Selman, 1980, p. 302). Egocentric thinking, second-person perspective, perspective coordination (e.g., capacity for abstraction) and negotiation strategies represent the four levels described in Selman’s perspective-taking development model. Persons develop this sequence of social perspective-taking over time. Successful resolution of all levels suggests that individuals can identify and understand what is best for the overall social relationship as well as resolve relationship conflict (Selman, 1980).

Each of the above perspective-taking abilities further correlates with a specific type of interpersonal negotiation strategy (often utilized to resolve interpersonal conflicts). Additionally, these strategies can be described in terms of orientation and maturity (Selman & Schultz, 1990). For example, individuals who vaguely identify perspectives different from their own and focus only on their own wants are likely engaging in unilateral (level 1) actions while individuals operating at a second-person perspective use reciprocal (level 2) negotiation strategies (e.g., cooperation, deal making). A third-person perspective relates to demonstrating collaborative actions (level 3) that accommodate one’s own needs as well as the partner’s (Karcher, 2002). A final component of Selman’s (1980) model relates to specific interpersonal orientations, or how individuals approach relationships. Specifically, some students “give in” during peer interactions (other-transforming) while others manipulate and threaten peers to meet their own needs (self-transforming).

Research suggests that aggressive and withdrawn individuals have immature negotiation strategies and poor perspective-taking abilities when compared to age-related peers (Selman, 1980). As a result, one purpose of pair counseling is helping persons adaptively use both self- and other-transforming strategies to create perspectives that satisfy each student’s needs. Related goals include increasing social-cognitive skills (e.g., perspective taking and problem solving), promoting interpersonal understanding and fostering social maturity (Schultz & Selman, 1998). Finally, working in collaborative pairs can significantly enhance student learning while simultaneously increasing the opportunity for corrective/constructive feedback (Slavin, 1996). For example, students working in dyads can increase the opportunity for cognitive disequilibrium—with the ultimate outcome of promoting perspective-taking ability, intellectual growth, deeper perspectives and reasoning.

Previous Findings and Outcomes

How does an individual benefit from pair counseling, and to what extent can this approach facilitate psychological, social, emotional, vocational and overall well-being? Over the past two decades, several researchers have explored these questions in residential and outpatient contexts, and most recently in academic settings. Qualitative reports—largely based on case studies and quantitative research typically using empirical designs—demonstrate pair counseling as a powerful intervention that significantly contributes to positive youth outcomes (Schultz, 1997).

Youth exhibiting severe aggression, withdrawal or other disruptive behavioral patterns (e.g., ADHD) are commonly referred for treatment, whether in outpatient or residential settings. Research also suggests that troubled children experience difficulty interacting with peers, exhibit low social competence, and lack psychological resilience (McCullough, Wilkins, & Selman, 1997). Based on this premise, Karcher & Lewis (2002) conducted a pilot study examining the effects of pair counseling with patients receiving inpatient hospitalization services. Results demonstrated significant reductions in aggressive and delinquent behaviors as well as increases in cognitive development. In essence, persons diagnosed with externalizing disorders (e.g., oppositional defiant disorder) learned how to make better decisions, resolve conflicts, and achieve higher interpersonal understanding when treated within a pair counseling context because it provided an avenue for self-reflection and peer interaction. Advantages of pair counseling also are effective for individuals experiencing internalizing symptoms such as depression, immaturity or social anxiety.

Schultz (1997) investigated the use of pair counseling among two adolescent girls—one more dominating and forceful, and the other more withdrawn and shy. The context of pair counseling appeared to enable the girls to identify, share and normalize feelings for one another. Furthermore, pair counseling served as a primary vehicle for allowing these youth to develop assertiveness and feel acceptance. Pairing also facilitated the acquisition of appropriate social skills among children diagnosed with ADHD as it promoted goal setting and a context in which self-control could be established. Finally, research indicates that pair counseling fosters understanding between individuals from diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Schneider, Karcher, and Schlapkohl (1999) published a case study that illustrated the benefits of implementing pair counseling when treating individuals from two different racial backgrounds. Specifically, this modality was utilized when two students of varying ethnic backgrounds were referred for counseling due to awkward and immature social skills. Over the course of treatment, the pair reflected and discussed shared experiences—eventually leading to decreased social isolation and stress experienced at school. It also was reported that the benefits extended beyond the school setting and further enhanced the students' relationships with their respective families. Although the current research supports the use of pair counseling to treat externalizing and internalizing symptoms, no research has empirically investigated the use of pair counseling as an intervention for college students seeking career services. A potentially promising approach would be to adapt the technique of pair counseling for college students engaging in the career decision-making process.

Matching in Pair Counseling

How does one optimally match persons in pair counseling? For counseling to be most effective, individuals with opposing interpersonal orientations and developmental needs should be matched (Kane, Raya, & Ayoub, 2002). It also becomes easier to facilitate problem solving when persons exhibit divergent styles. Base pairs are typically matched in terms of different negotiation preferences—one student who is forceful or demanding may be matched with another student who expresses timid or shy behavior. Research further suggests that the weaknesses and strengths of each individual can complement the other person's area of strength or weakness (Karcher, 2002). For example, a college student who is easily distracted may learn to relate and work better with others after being matched with a student who is attentive and detailed oriented; or, a more cautious student could be matched with an impulsive individual. Based on these examples, it seems that incorporating pair counseling and matching pairs can foster collaboration, active learning, and new ways of thinking about resolving career concerns. Also, from a social justice perspective, this type of counseling allows more clients to receive services.

Pair Counseling Techniques

While matching students serves as the foundation for progress and relationship formation, a secure environment must be established for these relationships to flourish. To improve the accuracy and overall effectiveness of pair counseling, Karcher (2002) prepared a comprehensive manual to standardize specific pair

techniques and procedures. For example, counseling sessions should be conducted in the same place and at the same time each week—for 50 minutes. Equally important is establishing rules, discussing goals and describing the outline of each session (Barr, Karcher, & Selman, 1997). It also is common for pair partners to choose which activities to perform during the session using negotiation strategies.

In the beginning of each session, the practitioner reviews successes and failures of previous meetings in order to foster reflections and improve session discussions. Next, matched pairs engage in the agreed upon activity or game while the counselor remains nondirective, purposely focusing on the interaction between the pair. Throughout this time, the counselor also helps negotiate conflicts, encourages the articulation of different points of view, and assists in developing solutions to problems. During the last 15 minutes of the session, the counselor becomes more directive to facilitate reflections and to discuss how conflicts could be handled differently in the future (Karcher, 2002). Finally, examples of cooperation and assertiveness occurring within the meeting are described and pairs are typically asked to discuss feelings, thoughts or behaviors that contributed to the success of the session.

In order to promote perspective-taking and foster developmental maturity for both individuals in the pair, the practitioner can employ empowering, linking and enabling during specific interactions, as conflict arises or at the conclusion of each session (Karcher, 2002). Empowering is often utilized for impulsive persons who experience difficulty articulating feelings or identifying beliefs, goals and desires. A person gains a sense of self-efficacy as the counselor reflects needs and subsequently empowers the person to achieve a more differentiated point of view. After a person recognizes and acknowledges personal interests, linking helps the pair coordinate different social perspectives. Additionally, the counselor may need to model or break down the conflict into smaller pieces so that a goal is identified and subsequently agreed upon. Next, the pair strives to generate alternative solutions with the ultimate goal of implementing a mutual strategy. In essence, the pair works together to solve a conflict that is satisfying for both parties. Enabling serves as a final intervention that encourages the matched pair to recognize long-term consequences of individual actions on their mutual relationship. For example, reviewing disagreements, processing interactions, and resolving differences serves as one technique for increasing collaboration, support and respect between the pairs.

Pair Counselor Roles

Fostering relationship development between two individuals and maintaining relationship functions such as autonomy and intimacy represent important counselor roles (Karcher, 2002). Another role relates to enhancing social skills. In other words, a pair counselor offers support during peer interactions and uses opportunities occurring within the session, peer play and guided reflection to promote perspective taking, encourage negotiation, resolve conflict, and enhance social skills.

After establishing a secure atmosphere and explaining the specific goals of pair counseling to each partner, the counselor devotes significant effort to promoting perspective taking and interpersonal understanding. Counselors employ specific techniques in order to accomplish this goal, such as empowering, linking and enabling, as discussed previously. It should be noted that each technique corresponds to levels of perspective taking that are just above the pair's current social and maturity level (Selman & Schultz, 1990). Other guidelines for ensuring a successful session include incorporating directive and nondirective techniques, accentuating positive interactions, and promoting connectedness between sessions.

Assessment in Pair Counseling

Assessing and evaluating pairs serves as a final function for pair counselors. A variety of evaluation measures have been developed and tested to determine the efficacy of pair counseling. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners recognize that assessment should be comprehensive, incorporating multiple points of view and several measures (Schultz, 1997). Commonly used measures to assess social skill competence and

interpersonal understanding include self-reports, interviews, observational checklists, school performance data and empirically-based questionnaires. For example, the Friends' Dilemma Interview (Selman, 1980) measures perspective-taking ability, conflict resolution and interpersonal understanding, while the Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies Interview (INS; Schultz, Yeates, & Selman, 1989) measures interpersonal autonomy. In terms of questionnaires, the Relationship Questionnaire (Schultz & Selman, 1998) presents 12 scenarios that assess personal meaning of relationships and self-reported action, while the Persons-in-Pairs Questionnaire (Schultz, 1997) explores the experience of pair counseling, feelings about being a pair partner, and things learned as a result of participating in pair counseling. Other scales include the Pair Therapy Process Scale (Selman, Watts, & Schultz, 1997) and the Community-Oriented Programs Environment Scale (Moos, 1996).

An Application of Pair Counseling in College Career Counseling

As noted by Karcher (1997), specific goals of pair counseling are a function of the context in which treatment is employed. Pair counseling has demonstrated its effectiveness with children, and the present authors propose that pair counseling could similarly be employed and be equally effective within a college career center to support freshmen and upperclassmen coping with academic or psychosocial transitions.

A Proposal for Adapting Pair Counseling at the University Level

Pair counseling serves as one intervention tool career counselors can utilize when assisting college students during stressful transitions, whether for the purpose of decreasing commitment anxiety and decision-making confusion when choosing a major, researching jobs, or applying to graduate programs. As research suggests that psychosocial development is necessary for successful performance in academic and vocational contexts, it seems that one advantage of pair counseling is fostering psychosocial development in college students (Deptula & Cohen, 2004; Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007). For example, relationships formed during the pair counseling process are likely to result in students learning how to share feelings, resolve differences, develop identities, gain feelings of autonomy, and manage thoughts on a deeper level. Likewise, based on Schultheiss's (2000) relational career counseling model, the facilitative nature of attachment relationships between students can be used for connecting personal, career and social domains—ultimately enhancing adjustment and overall development. This technique also fits well with more recent career theories that have emphasized a more holistic perspective when serving clients. Pair counseling further represents an avenue for translating theory into practice.

A second strength of pair counseling is its ability to help college students identify and learn the perspective of other college students from all cultural, ethnic, social, academic, class and religious backgrounds. As a result, students are likely to receive exposure to alternative points of view, develop diverse problem-solving strategies, and exhibit advanced decision-making skills. However, differences exist between pair counseling and approaches based on individual and group counseling.

Although individual counseling is effective for treating numerous problems and disorders, it does not provide students with direct social functioning with peers. This serves as one limitation for career counselors assisting students seeking interviewing tips or guidelines for resume writing. For example, students working in pairs on these tasks are likely to benefit because of the increased opportunity for reflection and development of interpersonal competence. Similarly, group counseling may not provide students with a direct opportunity to learn or interact with one another. For example, conflicts or disagreements may affect an entire group, but not a specific relationship. Alternatively, the structure of pair counseling protects against the opportunity for students to become overwhelmed or overstimulated by group processes while simultaneously providing clients with resources for support and coping (Karcher, 1997). Third, the approach of pair counseling addresses the developmental level of each pair member and has specific interventions to further facilitate cognitive growth. A final rationale for implementing pair counseling within a college career setting relates to cost-effectiveness. Specifically, as the number of students seeking career services continues to grow and as the number of staff and

other resources remains the same or declines, it becomes critical to implement interventions that meet or fulfill this need.

Matching Pairs, Sessions and Techniques

Several factors should be considered when determining pairs. Based on the current literature, the most effective pairing typically occurs among same-gender partners and individuals sharing similar academic or cognitive abilities. These similarities likely increase collaboration, communication and comfort between individuals because the individuals are seen as equal partners. Furthermore, clients are often matched according to opposing interpersonal orientations as it fosters more effective problem solving and discussion. Similarly, clients sharing similar interests, work experiences and occupational goals are generally appropriate pairs. Pairing also is a function of the career service requested; clients selecting a college major have different needs than clients applying for employment or creating a portfolio. It should be noted that the above represent hypotheses, and because no research has empirically investigated pair counseling in a career setting or used content related to vocational decision-making, these suggestions should be experimentally tested. Furthermore, researchers should consider alternative pairings (e.g., cross-age pairs) to identify which factors are most important when matching clients. Following the matching process, how are sessions conducted, techniques implemented and goals achieved?

Increased attention and research efforts are needed for answering the above questions because minimal research has examined pair counseling using brief interventions or drop-in advising services for career counseling. As the majority of clients seeking career services rarely “drop by” more than three or four times in a semester, and often spend less than one hour per session, it seems that one option is intervening early and specifically targeting students who are at-risk for dropping out of college early (e.g., undecided major, first-time-in-college students) or who are already experiencing difficulty in their academic programs. After identifying at-risk students, similar techniques of empowering, linking and enabling should be employed.

Stumbling Blocks and Potential Ethical Issues

While pair counseling has demonstrated efficacy in treating a variety of disorders and across a range of clinical settings, several potential problems have been noted within the literature. First, mismatching among partners may decrease treatment effectiveness; opportunities for conflict increase when interpersonal orientations, levels of maturity and perspective-taking abilities differ significantly between partners (Karcher, 1997). Furthermore, without an adequate level of rapport and security, pairs may find it difficult to communicate, interact and be honest with one another. Based on these findings, it becomes critical that career counselors develop strategies for matching pairs. For example, the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996) could be utilized to match students of varying levels of anxiety, decision-making confusion and external conflict, or it may be more appropriate to match pairs based on Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality types. The CTI could also be used as an outcome measure to evaluate the effectiveness of pair counseling. Similarly, educators and researchers should consider how they might pair students who are enrolled in an undergraduate career development course and thus already have pre-existing relationships. Alternatively, how might it work for two members of an organization (e.g., Greeks) to engage in pair counseling?

Disclosing too much information (e.g., making the other partner uncomfortable), breaking confidentiality, and prematurely terminating the sessions represent additional concerns. For example, if an individual shares information outside of the counseling relationship, the other individual may develop mistrust issues or be reluctant to reveal feelings or opinions in future sessions. In order to reduce the likelihood of these ethical problems occurring, it is important for counselors to maintain structure, develop rules, and take notes following each session. When facing complex situations, counselors should consult with others, seek supervision, and use resources.

Future Directions

An important first step for researchers is to conduct studies beyond externalizing disorders and internalizing problems to more cognitively advanced and psychosocial issues encountered by college students and young adults. For example, the influence and potentially positive impact pair counseling has when assisting clients making career decisions and selecting educational options based on vocational goals represents a cognitive example that could be explored more closely by future researchers. Alternatively, researchers could examine how social support between pairs fosters career readiness and autonomy; would an individual feeling discriminated against or afraid to “come out” experience more comfort in making decisions when involved in a positive social relationship? Similarly, the literature and methodology of collaborative learning can be incorporated when assisting clients under a pair counseling approach. Whether pairs work together to explore a significant question (e.g., what college major should I choose?), resolve a problem (e.g., how to write a resume) or complete an activity on the Internet (e.g., research occupations) to make a more informed career choice, the principle components and methodology used for collaborative learning will be essential as researchers move forward in better understanding and implementing pair counseling. As with collaborative learning, these activities should be clearly defined, and individuals must feel supported and validated, but also challenged (Yang, 2006).

Another area for future research concerns the issue of social justice. Researchers could evaluate the cost-effectiveness of pair counseling over an academic year by comparing the number of clients served, the duration of each session, and specific outcomes associated with participating in the pair counseling process (e.g., career satisfaction, career readiness, reduction in dysfunctional thoughts).

Formal quantitative and qualitative research designs are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of pair counseling (Horton, 2008). Specifically, researchers should focus on employing true experiments or at least quasi-experimental designs that incorporate random assignment and comparison groups. Similarly, it is important to collect information over a longer intervention period that includes multiple data collection dates and assessment instruments measuring self-esteem, career readiness, and anxiety. In addition to these areas for future research, it would be beneficial to have a larger number of pairs across a variety of ethnicities, genders, academic levels (freshman through graduate student), and college majors (Horton, 2008). Third, it would be beneficial to explore outcomes of pair counseling for different disorders and across different levels of perspective taking/negotiation to determine which pairings are most effective. Finally, it is important to explore the effectiveness of pair counseling using a variety of total sessions. Researchers could evaluate whether paired students benefit from 1–3 sessions, which is typical practice at career centers advocating brief-staff assisted services, or whether a more traditional 10–13 sessions is necessary for positive treatment results.

Conclusion

Pair counseling could assume an important role in the area of career intervention, as it represents an approach that facilitates dyadic, positive social interactions between two clients. Through collaborative discussions among matched pairs, and under the guidance of a professional counselor, students could identify transferrable skills, select majors, and learn how to make more effective career decisions. Similarly, pairs could provide emotional support to one another while implementing career choices and/or discussing options for reducing career barriers and feelings of anxiety. In addition to bridging the gap between theory and practice, pair counseling represents a cost-effective approach that would enable more college students seeking career services to be served. Future research is needed to determine what types of clients benefit the most and for what career problems this approach is most effective.

References

- Amundson, N. (2006). Challenges for career interventions in changing contexts. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*, 3–14. doi:10.1007/s10775-006-0002-4
- Barr, D., Karcher, J., & Selman, R. (1998). Pair therapy: Promoting psychosocial development in troubled children. In J. D. Noshpitz, N. E. Alessi, J. T. Coyle, S. Harrison, & S. Eth (Eds.), *Handbook of child and adolescent psychiatry*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Brown, C. (2002). Career counseling practitioners: Reflection on theory, research, and practice. *Journal of Career Development, 29*, 109–127.
- Deptula, D. P., & Cohen, R. (2004). Aggressive, rejected, and delinquent children and adolescents: A comparison of their friendships. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9*, 75–104. doi:10.1016/S1359-1789(02)00117-9
- Hinkelman, J.M., & Luzzo, D.A. (2007). Mental health and career development of college students. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 85*, 143–147.
- Holland, J. (1973). *Making vocational choices: A theory of careers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Horton, J. (2008). *Pair counseling for high school students: Improving friendship skills, interpersonal relationships, and behavior among aggressive and withdrawn adolescents* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. (3318937)
- Hughes, D., & Gration, G. (2006). *Performance indicators and benchmarks in career guidance in the United Kingdom* (Occasional Paper). Retrieved from University of Derby, Centre for Guidance Studies Web site: http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/icegs_performance_indicators_and_benchmarks2006.pdf
- Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research, 61*, 505–532. doi:10.2307/1170575
- Jekielek, S. M., Moore, K. A., & Hair, E. C. (2002). *Mentoring programs and youth development*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED465457).
- Kane, S., Raya, P., & Ayoub, C. (1997). *Pair play therapy with toddlers and preschoolers*. In R. L. Selman, C. L. Watts, & L. H. Schultz (Eds.), *Fostering friendship: Pair therapy for treatment and prevention* (pp. 185–206). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Karcher, M. J. (1996). Pairing for the prevention of prejudice: Pair counseling to promote intergroup understanding. *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work, 11*, 119–143.
- Karcher, J. (2002). The principles and practice of pair counseling: A dyadic developmental play therapy for aggressive, withdrawn, and socially immature youth. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 11*(2), 121–147. doi:10.1037/h0088868
- Karcher, J., & Lewis, S. (2002). Pair counseling: The effects of a dyadic developmental play therapy on interpersonal understanding and externalizing behaviors. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 11*(1), 19–41. doi:10.1037/h0088855
- Lee, F., & Johnston, J. (2001). Innovations in career counseling. *Journal of Career Development, 27*(3), 177–185. doi:10.1177/089484530102700304
- Maxwell, M. (1990). Does tutoring help? A look at the literature. *Review of Research in Developmental Education, 7*, 3–7.
- McCullough, A., Wilkins, G., Selman, R. (1997). Pair therapy in residential treatment center for children and adolescents. In R. L. Selman, C. L. Watts, & L. H. Schultz (Eds.), *Fostering friendship: Pair therapy for treatment and prevention* (pp. 101–120). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- McDonnell, J. (1994). Peer tutoring: A pilot scheme among computer science undergraduates. *Mentoring and Tutoring, 2*(2), 3–10.
- Miller, M., & Brown, S. (2005). Counseling for career choice: Implications for improving interventions and working with diverse populations. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 441–465). New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Moos, R. H. (1996). *Community Oriented Program Environment Scale: Sampler Set Manual, Test Booklets, and Scoring Key, 3rd ed.* Redwood City, CA: Mind Garden.
- Parmer, T., & Rush, L. (2003). The next decade in career counseling: Cocoon maintenance or metamorphosis? *The Career Development Quarterly, 52*, 26–34.
- Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

- Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Sampson, J. P., Dozier, V. C., & Colvin, G. P. (2011). Translating career theory to practice: The risk of unintentional social injustice. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 89*, 326–337.
- Sampson, J. P., Peterson, G. W., Lenz, J. G., Reardon, R. C., & Saunders, D. (1996). *Career Thoughts Inventory: Professional Manual*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Schneider, B., Karcher, M., & Schlapkohl, W. (1999). Relationship counseling across cultures: Cultural sensitivity and beyond. In P. Pederson (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A fourth force in psychological interventions?* (pp. 167–190). Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis.
- Schultheiss, D. (2000). Emotional-social issues in the provision of career counseling. In D. A. Luzzo (Ed.), *Career counseling of college students: An empirical guide to strategies that work* (pp. 43–62). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Schultz, L. H. (1997). A comprehensive framework for evaluating pairs. In R. L. Selman, C. L. Watts, & L. H. Schultz (Eds.), *Fostering friendship: Pair therapy for treatment and prevention* (pp. 231–250). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Schultz, L. H. & Selman, R. L. (1989). Bridging the gap between interpersonal thought and action in early adolescence: The role of psychodynamic processes. *Development and Psychopathology, 1*, 133–152.
- Schultz, L., Yeates, K. & Selman, R. (1989). The interpersonal negotiation strategies interview manual. Unpublished manual, Harvard University.
- Schunk, D. (1987). Self-efficacy and motivated learning. In N. Hastings & J. Schwieso (Eds.), *New directions in educational psychology: Behavior and motivation in the classroom* (pp. 233–252). East Sussex, England: The Falmer Press.
- Selman, R. L. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding: Developmental and clinical analyses*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Selman, R. L., & Schultz, L. H. (1990). *Making a friend in youth: Developmental theory and pair therapy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Selman, R. L., Levitt, M., & Schultz, L. (1997). The friendship framework: Tools for the assessment of psychosocial development. In R. L. Selman, C. L. Watts, & L. H. Schultz (Eds.), *Fostering friendship: Pair therapy for treatment and prevention* (pp. 31–52). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Selman, R., Watts, C., & Schultz, L. (1997). *Fostering friendship: Pair therapy for treatment and prevention*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Slavin, R. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 21*, 43–69. doi:10.1006/ceps.1996.0004
- Strong, E. (1927). *Vocational interest blank*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Super, D. E. (1992). Toward a comprehensive theory of career development. In D. H. Montross & C. J. Shinkman (Eds.), *Career development: Theory and practice* (pp. 35–64). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Thrift, E., & Amundson, N. (2005). Hermeneutic-narrative approach to career counseling: An alternative to postmodernism. *Perspectives in Education, 23*, 9–20.
- Topping, K., Watson, G., Jarvis, R., & Hill, S. (1996). Same-year paired peer tutoring in undergraduate mathematics. *Teaching in Higher Education, 1*, 341–356. doi:10.1080/1356251960010305
- Wampold, B. E., Lichtenberg, J. W., & Waehler, C. A. (2002). Principles of empirically supported interventions in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*, 197–217.
- Whiston, S. C. (2002). Application of principles: Career counseling and interventions. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*, 218–237. doi:10.1177/0011000002302002
- Yang, S. J. H. (2006). Context aware ubiquitous learning environments for peer-to-peer collaborative learning. *Educational Technology & Society, 9*(1), 188–201.