

**What is your Superpower?: An Elementary Group Using Bibliotherapy with  
Diverse Fourth and Fifth Grade Boys**

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### **Abstract**

School counselors need creative interventions to engage students in small groups. With students' interests changing quickly, one thing that has remained constant has been a fascination with comic books. They offer an enjoyable and creative way to engage children with stories that resonate with them. Additionally, bibliotherapy is an accessible and easy to implement strategy for children of all ages. This article will discuss the utilization of a comic book in a superhero bibliotherapy group with a diverse group of fourth and fifth grade students from a Gestalt perspective.

*Keywords:* bibliotherapy, school counseling, Gestalt group therapy, comic books, creative arts

## **What is your Superpower?: An Elementary Group Using Bibliotherapy with Diverse Fourth and Fifth Grade Boys**

School counselors have a tremendous amount of responsibility to meet the growing needs of their students. Although the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) suggests a student to counselor ratio of 250:1, the national average for 2017 to 2018 was 442:1 (ASCA, 2019). These high numbers make it difficult for school counselors to address students' issues individually. ASCA recommended that a successful school counselor address students' needs individually and in small groups (ASCA, 2019).

Bibliotherapy has shown to be an effective intervention for children or those under the age of 18 (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013) both individually and in small groups. Processing the material read is an important aspect of bibliotherapy (De Vries et al., 2017). Comic books could serve as the reading material for bibliotherapy purposes as well. Comic books are relatable and easy for children to understand (Rubin & Livesay, 2006). Comic books allow for readers to project their story and issues onto characters within the story, which could make Gestalt therapy an appropriate therapeutic approach when using comic books. Gestalt group therapy allows for students to process and give voice to creative artifacts through storytelling, processing questions, and play (Oaklander, 2001). Both Gestalt group therapy and bibliotherapy work towards the goal of improving the students' self-concept (Cornett & Cornett, 1980; Oaklander, 2001). This article will discuss a five-week bibliotherapy comic book group that utilized Gestalt group therapy with three groups of fourth and fifth-grade students at a diverse, low-income, Title 1 school in southern United States.

## **American School Counseling Association**

As encouraged by the ASCA National Model (2019), school counselors prioritize working with students individually and in small groups to address students' academics, behaviors, and attendance issues. According to ASCA (2014) effective school counseling programs can measure students' growth by using the Mindset and Behavior standards. The Mindset and Behavior standards assess students' ability to learn new social skills and apply them with their peers and adults through individual or small group settings (ASCA, 2014). Beyond ASCA prioritizing small group counseling in school counseling programs, research has suggested that small groups provide students the opportunity to connect with other students and improve academically (Kayler & Sherman, 2009). Due to time constraints, school counselors found that a small group format helps provide more services to a larger number of students (Sink et al., 2012). Small groups are beneficial in that they allow school counselors to serve more students, children to apply social skills, and implement aspects of the ASCA Mindset and Behavior standards.

## **Bibliotherapy**

The term bibliotherapy was created in 1916 by Samuel McChord Crothers, but has been used for hundreds of years (Bate & Schuman, 2016). Bibliotherapy has evolved over time, but in its current form it is a therapeutic intervention that uses books, poems, and stories to assist people with behavioral and emotional issues (De Vries et al., 2017). Bibliotherapy has been used by teachers and school counselors to assist elementary students in problem solving, coping skills development, and social skills (De Vries et al., 2017; Forgan, 2012; Iaquinta & Hipsky, 2006; Rozalski et al., 2010;

Shechtman, 2017). Bibliotherapy is an important tool to help communicate with children (Meany-Walen et al., 2015).

Bibliotherapy uses the classic psychotherapy stages of identification, catharsis, insight, and universalism (De Vries et al., 2017). According to De Vries et al. (2017), identification occurs when students find a character with whom they connect in the story. Once they identify a character, they move to the catharsis stage in which they have an emotional release. After catharsis, they move to the insight stage in which they identify issues in their lives and discover ways to manage them similarly to character they connect with in the book. Lastly, they move to the universalism stage in which they begin to understand their own issues and become empathetic towards others. In addition to these four stages, some have posited that projection is a fifth stage. In this stage, students take the four stages and apply to them to their own lives (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013).

Through bibliotherapy the readers connect to the story and no longer feel alone (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013). A school counselor uses bibliotherapy to assist the student in developing empathy, creating a positive self-image, practicing tolerance, respect, and acceptance of others, and examining the morality of personal values (Cornett & Cornett, 1980). Also, bibliotherapy can assist the student in creating new decision-making skills, increased ability to self-evaluate, and understand human behavior and motives better (Cornett & Cornett, 1980).

McCulliss and Chamberlain (2013) completed a meta-analysis of bibliotherapy studies published from 1997 to 2011 and focused on children under the age of 18 years old. In their study, they found that bibliotherapy was effective in multiple areas for

children such as aggression/bullying, anxiety, depression, and issues with parents and guardians. Also, McCulliss and Chamberlain (2013) found that bibliotherapy was effective when used in a small group setting.

### **Comic Books**

Bibliotherapy has a broad definition of what can be used for storytelling (De Vries et al., 2017), and comic books are timely and appropriate for this intervention. Comic books are often considered creative and colorful stories that children can easily consume and offer a novel approach to bibliotherapy. Comic books and comic movie sales are over \$1 billion annually and are showing no signs of slowing down (Salkowitz, 2019). Main characters in comic books are often superheroes. In comics the superheroes' origin story is shared, along with how they use their powers to help others, and how they manage their new responsibilities. These stories provide children the opportunity to connect with a character. It allows children to contemplate morality and how they would act in those situations. While reading comics, children process the stories through imaginative play; furthermore, this comic inspired play allows child to gain power over personal issues in the child's own story and practice helpful choices in managing them (Rubin & Livesay, 2006). More importantly, it provides the opportunity for children to recognize that they have autonomy and power to manage their issues in and out of school (Rubin & Livesay, 2006).

Comics have a long history of addressing social justice and multicultural issues with diverse characters in their stories (Mishou, 2016). The ASCA National Model (2019) prioritizes school counseling programs to work with the school to value and address multiculturalism within the school and community. When discussing

multiculturalism in schools, it is important to choose materials that provide students the opportunity to think about diversity (Mongillo & Holland, 2016; Vittrup, 2016). A comic with a protagonist representative of a marginalized population in a small group setting allows for a school counseling program to teach and assess the ASCA (2014) Mindset and Behavior standards. In addition to using a multicultural comic, it is important for small group facilitators to be culturally sensitive (Sink et al., 2012). It is difficult to address multicultural issues within a school-based small group, but it can lead to growth for students (Sink et al., 2012).

### **Gestalt Play Therapy Groups**

Play is necessary for children's development, and play therapy is developmentally appropriate for children (Oaklander, 1988; Piaget, 1951; Ray, 2016). Developmentally, children are still learning verbal language and tend to use symbols to communicate since their cognitive development supersedes their verbal development (Piaget, 1951). Children play with toys and art mediums to create symbolism to communicate without words (Oaklander, 1988; Piaget, 1951; Ray, 2016). Play is children's language and toys are their words because the left hemisphere which primarily processes language does not develop as quickly as the right hemisphere which primarily processes emotions (Chiron et al., 1997; De Kovel et al., 2018; Landreth, 2012; Mento et al., 2010; Perryman et al., 2019; Rauch, 1996). Counselors can meet children's developmental needs appropriately through connecting with children's right brain hemisphere through play therapy. While there are several theoretical perspectives of play therapy, the Association for Play Therapy (APT) defined play therapy generally as "the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an

interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development (2019, n.p.). Play rather than talk therapy is developmentally appropriate for children.

One theoretical approach to play therapy is Gestalt in which children experiment through play to learn about themselves in the context of their world (Carmichael, 2006). Gestalt therapy is humanistic, present-centered, and process-oriented with a focus on healthy integration of the total organism involving the senses, body, emotions, and intellect (Oaklander, 2001). Gestalt play therapists believe interpersonal contact and awareness foster growth (Corey, 2011). This growth is viewed through a paradoxical theory of change which Corey (2011) described as “accept[ing] who and what we are rather than striving to become what we should be” (p. 294). In other words when individuals accept who they are, it opens possibilities for change. Children have little cognitive understanding and emotional maturity to implement this paradoxical theory, so experience and experiments within a therapeutic relationship help the child to become aware of and define self (Oaklander, 2001). The counselor’s first priority in Gestalt play therapy is to establish a strong relationship with the child.

The foundation of the therapeutic process is the I/Thou relationship, which involves the counselor being genuine and non-judgmental (Oaklander, 1999; Oaklander, 2001). To establish an I/Thou relationship, a counselor must accept the child as the child is and be present with full contact regardless of child’s behavior (Oaklander, 1999; Oaklander, 2001). It is the counselor’s responsibility to maintain a dynamic in which neither the child nor the counselor is more superior (Oaklander, 1999; Oaklander,



2001). Sessions are like a dance in which the counselor and child interact and take turns leading based on the desires and needs of the child (Oaklander, 2001). While this can be challenging, it is also the basis of the relationship. To facilitate the Gestalt experiences, the counselor works to normalize the child's emotions and facilitate the child's growth in self-concept through using projective and creative techniques such as drawing, puppets, clay, music, storytelling, games, and play (Carroll, 2009; Oaklander, 1999; Oaklander, 2001). Not only do these creative approaches work in individual therapy, expressive arts activities promote the group process with children and adolescents (Perryman, Moss, & Cochran, 2015). The counselor facilitates an I/Thou relationship and creative experiences that promote the therapeutic group process.

There are three stages of a Gestalt group. In the first stage, the counselor facilitates trust and helps group members identify commonalities (Corey, 2011). It is common for group members to introject by accepting others' beliefs and not questioning the group leader. Additionally, retroreflection is common in the first stage as evident by group members holding back, expressing little, and assigning to self what would like to do to someone else (Corey, 2011). A shift occurs in the second stage in which group members question authority (Corey, 2011). In the second stage, the counselor facilitates awareness of group norms and encourages members to challenge norms and differentiate roles (Corey, 2011). Projection is common as evidence by disowning aspects of self and ascribing them to someone else (Corey, 2011). In the third stage, there is group cohesion and real contact; furthermore, group members make meaningful discoveries (Corey, 2011). The counselor facilitates closure and helps group members

identify unfinished business to continue to process after group termination (Corey, 2011).

Gestalt group play therapists work to respect students' autonomy and promote member cohesion. Anything the counselor suggests as the group leader is simply an invitation that a group member may accept or decline, since the counselor trusts the member's self-regulation potential (Greenwald, 1972). The facilitator would therefore never force a group member to participate in an art activity but would instead go with their resistance, recognizing it as a way of coping and protecting themselves. The counselor trusts the children and their ability to self-regulate. Gestalt group play therapists must find ways to uphold the Gestalt principals and integrate their own unique style. Oaklander (1988) emphasized that each Gestalt play therapist must accept and be honest with the child, find their own way to use the art of therapy, and use their skill, knowledge, and, creativity, senses, and intuition. In addition to using intuition Gestalt play therapist consider children's development. For older or more verbal children, play therapist gently prompt them to connect their projection to their reality through a statement such as, "Do you ever feel like the superhero?" (Oaklander, 1988). These prompts encourage children to connect their projection to their own lives. Specifically, these prompts promote the child's gain in a stronger sense of self-identity, self-support, and responsibility (Oaklander, 1988). The group described in this paper applied Gestalt theory to groups of fourth and fifth grade diverse boys through the use of comic books and creative techniques.

## **Superhero Bibliography Group**

### **Students**

The setting was an elementary Title 1 school where 90% of students receive free or discounted lunch, and 95% of students fall into the low-income range. Additionally, the school was behind in science, math, reading, and English as indicated by the most recent Measures of Academic Progress test findings. The racial demographics of the school in 2018 to 2019 academic year were 54% Latinx, 33% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Marshallese), 9% White, and 3% Black/African American. Despite this being a diverse school, there is a lack of diversity represented amongst teachers, administrators, and staff. This group consisted of four students from fourth grade. The group was facilitated by the two doctoral level students trained in group facilitation and play therapy. All four students in this group were males, and three of them were Marshallese and one of them was Latinx.

### **Procedure**

For the 2018 to 2019 academic year, there were a total of 540 students at the school, with one full-time school counselor, this greatly exceeds the ASCA (2019) recommended student to school counselor ratio of 250:1 (ASCA 2019) and the 2019 national average of 455:1 (Bray, 2019). While working to align the school counseling program with the ASCA National Model (2019), small groups were identified as a student need. With such a large ratio of students, two doctoral practicum students from a nearby university assisted with small groups. The school counselor and both practicum doctoral students had received training in play therapy and had supervised experiences facilitating creative interventions with children and facilitating groups. The

doctoral students received an hour of supervision per week by a Registered Play Therapist Supervisor along with supervision as part of a course in which they were enrolled. The two practicum doctoral students have a focus on clinical mental health counseling, with one of them currently also working towards school counseling licensure.

The facilitators and supervisor met and discussed the needs in the school and what small group topic would be most beneficial to students. They decided that a small group focused on connecting with other students, emotional regulation, and strengths identification through bibliotherapy would address student's needs. Facilitators discussed appropriate books to use in the group and decided that a comic book would be most beneficial due to the popularity of comics in the school. Facilitators aligned their group goals with the following ASCA Growth and Mindset standards (2014).

### **Weekly Plan**

The group was scheduled to meet once a week for 35 minutes over five weeks. Students were selected for the group by teacher referrals. Once a student was referred to the group, the school counselor then met with each student individually and completed a screening to ensure they were developmentally appropriate for the group.

The comic chosen was *Ultimate Comics: Spider-Man* (Bendis & Pichelli, 2018) which follows the development of Miles Morales from a regular high-schooler to discovering he is the new Spider-Man. Miles is a young person of color who is struggling with his identity and newfound strengths. This story was chosen due to the students being young people of color in a school system and community that does not have equal representation of their identities. In addition to the connection between the

students and Miles being a part of marginalized groups, the story discusses family and school issues, bullying, and death (Bendis & Pichelli, 2018).

The facilitators were intentional to create a weekly plan that addressed the goals of bibliotherapy; increase empathy, tolerance, respect, acceptance of others, and create a positive self-image (Cornett & Cornett, 1980), and reach the three stages of Gestalt group therapy (Corey, 2011). Facilitators planned readings, activities, and process questions that were developmentally appropriate for each group and according to the stages of group as described by Corey (2011). A discussion on specific planned activities is discussed below. It was decided before the group that the facilitators would read the comic to the group, rather than have the students read the comic out loud to avoid and feelings of insecurity that may be felt by those who are not fluent in English or have any reading or learning problems. After the last planned group, facilitators created a culminating experience for students. Facilitators scheduled a field trip for the group to go a local art museum to view a national superhero art exhibit. There were five chaperones who attended; two doctoral counselor education students, one Master's of Counseling student, one faculty member who is a Registered Play Therapist Supervisor, and one school counselor. Through attending the art exhibit, students were able to rely on their stronger self-concept and practice their self-discipline and self-control through making contact in a new environment. Lastly, it provided students with the chance to travel to an area that most of them have never visited.

### **Interventions**

Facilitators were intentional to select interventions and process questions that were creative and would assist students in connecting with the material. At the end of

each week, students completed a power pose. A power pose is when a person stands in a way that a superhero would stand and takes up as much space as they like with their body. This has been shown to be an effective tool to increase confidence in people (Carney et al., 2010). However, it was primarily used in this group as a mindfulness intervention. The group decided how long they would do the power pose each week, and during that time they were encouraged to focus on their breathing and being still and quiet. This was done to attempt to have a smooth, calm transition for them back to class.

Other interventions used were the All About me Poster (Author Unknown). The All About Me poster focused on the following: three things for the future, three things you enjoy doing, their super-power, and one burning question they had. Materials needed for the All About me poster are writing or drawing materials and paper. After the students created the All About Me poster, they shared with the group. The counselor worked to link the commonalities among students and reflect the content and feelings the students shared. Additionally, students created a superhero. Students were given materials such as pipe cleaners, clay, glitter, pillowcases, beads, stickers, and googly eyes to create a superhero. After the students each made their superhero, the students were asked to share how they felt looking at it, what superpower it had, and anything else that they would like to share about it. Another intervention was that students were prompted to create a comic strip about their superhero and how they used their superpowers in the comic strip. A page with black comic book strips was provided and children were encouraged to write and draw within the comic book strip to tell their superhero's story. Lastly, students were given capes that they could decorate however

they wanted. Students were given stickers, crayons, markers, streamers, and beads and encouraged to make a cape that represented their superhero. In this activity the student became the superhero and put body movement with their story by moving around in the cape however they chose. Students were given all their creations to keep at the end of the group.

Throughout each week group facilitators used self-disclosure to model and link students in order to normalize the students' emotions and experiences. Then the group facilitators used Gestalt prompts to encourage the students to project and gain awareness of themselves. The group facilitators would say, "You be the superhero. What superpower do you have? How will you use your super-power?" This is similar to what Oaklander (1988) described in her own Gestalt play therapy work. Since the students created their superhero through a comic strip, playdoh, various art supplies, and then became the superhero with a cape they designed, they processed more deeply how they identified with the character, Miles. This encouraged students' contact with their senses, each other, the facilitators, their art, and themselves (Oaklander, 1988). Additionally, facilitators utilized the ACT limit setting model suggested by Landreth (2012), in which the students feeling is acknowledged, the limit is communicated, and an acceptable behavior is targeted. The consistency of this model was helpful in students knowing what to expect as well as instilling self-control and responsibility.

### **Practical Application**

The Superhero Bibliotherapy group met once a week for 35 minutes and no sessions were missed. The second session was facilitated by only one of the doctoral

students. Pseudonyms we assigned to group participants were Derek, Charlie, Darrel, and Jon.

### **Session 1**

In the first session, the group worked on building trust. Students asked facilitators and other students questions to connect with each other. This reflected the first Gestalt group therapy stage of trying to connect with and build a safe space within the group. During the first group, Charlie began to get up and move around the room and play with things he found in the classroom. He was self-regulating, as he would finish activities before other students. While reading the comic, some of the goals of bibliotherapy emerged. The story began with Miles being worried about getting selected to go to a prestigious high school in New York (Bendis & Pichelli, 2018). Students began to show empathy towards Miles and reasons why he might be feeling anxious and excited to attend a new school.

### **Session 2**

In the second session, the group worked towards establishing a relationship with the group facilitator. While doing the All About Me poster, the students shared with the facilitator individually rather than with each other. This reflected that the group was still in the first Gestalt group therapy stage (Corey, 2011). In order to address Charlie's energy from the first session, facilitators brought in a basket of fidget toys for the group to use if any of the students had excess energy. More goals from bibliotherapy emerged within this week. The story this week discussed Miles figuring out that he now has super-powers and what that means for him. The All About Me poster prompted students to identify their super-power. Students were able to identify their super-power and



modeled their answers after Miles' story. They began to create their own positive self-image from the story (Cornett & Cornett, 1980). Additionally, this showed that the students were beginning to reach the stages used in bibliotherapy of identification (De Vries et al., 2017).

### **Session 3**

In the third session, the students worked to differentiate their roles. This reflected that the group was now in the second Gestalt group therapy stage (Corey, 2011). Charlie was the entertainer, Derek the helper of Charlie, Jon the adult pleaser, and Darrell the observer. Charlie would often try to make the group laugh and attempt to distract the group by getting up and making noises. Derek would consistently remind Charlie of appropriate behaviors and not to do those things in group. Jon would share how he felt only with the facilitators and would look to Jon if Charlie was acting out. Darrell liked to work independently and did not like to share with the group. He completed all activities but did not engage verbally in processing or discussion. In this group, students continued to work towards the goal of creating a positive self-image by creating their own superhero (Cornett & Cornett, 1980). In addition to this, students were prompted throughout the story to empathize with characters. The story discussed how Miles began to use his powers to fight off bullies who were threatening him (Bendis & Pichelli, 2018). Students were prompted to identify how Miles might have been feeling. Students empathized with Miles and identified him feeling scared and angry.

### **Session 4**

In the fourth session, the group worked through resistance. A student was in tears when he was picked up from his class and was checked out soon after reaching the

group room. The students sat in silence looking down. The facilitators reflected this and that it was hard to see a group member cry and leave. The facilitators reflected that the students did not want to be there today and were quieter than last session. Charlie said that they did not want to do the make a hero activity. Jon reflected about times that he had been upset in the past and he had cried. Other students did not respond to Jon and then Jon did not speak for much of the group. Even though there was resistance in this session, facilitators thought that it showed that the students were becoming more empathetic and beginning to understand themselves in relation to others more. Facilitators discussed this with their supervisors and theorized that the group was not ready to move on without the entire group in attendance, which could have been a cause of the resistance.

### **Session 5**

In the fifth session, the group worked on their self-awareness to make different choices in their play and group dynamic. This reflected that the group was in the third Gestalt group therapy stage (Corey, 2011). Students made contactful statements with each other such as “stop touching me.” These boundaries were mostly in relation to Charlie and helped the other students to self-regulate. Charlie was dysregulated by the changes in the group dynamics. The group facilitators utilized Landreth’s (2012) ultimate ACT limit since Charlie chose to not follow previous limits and choose to go back to class. Charlie made contactful statements to the facilitators about his displeasure. Once Charlie left the room, one student laid on a yoga mat and said, “I just started to relax.” The students were expressive with each other and the facilitators. Facilitators thought students not getting angry with Charlie and stating their boundaries

was evidence that the students had an increase in tolerance and understanding of human behaviors.

### **Session 6**

A nearby museum had a special art display of superheroes. As a final meeting and way to culminate their group experience, students and facilitators took a fieldtrip to view the display. This experience also offered students an opportunity to practice the skills they had learned in the group., Students wore their capes that they had created in group to the museum exhibit. They had never been to the museum or that far from their neighborhoods. With their stronger sense of self, they shared their opinions. They shared what they liked and did not like about the art. They engaged their senses through observing the art and feeling the plants outside the museum. They reflected each other's process much as the counselors had been doing for them in the previous sessions. Mostly, they were more playful and freer while also being respectful to those around them. Now they were not simply projecting they were implementing their awareness. They became their own superheroes.

### **Discussion**

This creative approach to using comic books in a bibliotherapy Gestalt group for diverse fourth and fifth graders can be an appropriate tool for school counselors to use to address ASCA's Mindsets and Behaviors (2014). Although no formal assessments were used, the group facilitators used their clinical judgement and anecdotal feedback from teachers and other school personnel to assess the impact of the group. Additionally, facilitators reviewed the ASCA Mindsets and Behavior goals before and after each session and discussed if there was evidence of participants meeting these

standards. In the first week of the group, participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset M 3 (sense of belonging in the school environment) and Behavior (2014) B-SS 2 (create positive and supportive relationships with other students) as evidenced by them asking each other questions and attempting to find connections with each other. In the second week of the group, participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset M 2 (self-confidence in ability to succeed) and M 3 and Behavior (2014) B-SS 2 again as evidenced by them completing the All About Me Poster and by connecting with Miles in the story and creating their own story similar to his. In the third week of the group, participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset and Behavior (2014) B-SS 5 (demonstrate ethical decision making and social responsibility) as evidenced by them empathizing with a character being bullied in the story and identifying the appropriate things to do to stop bullying. In the fourth week of the group, participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset and Behavior (2014) B-SS 2 as evidenced by them not wanting to complete the weekly activity due to a group member being absent. They were not ready to move on without him, showing a positive relationship had been formed. The fifth week of the group participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset and Behavior (2014) B-SS 8 (demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self when necessary) and B-SMS 2 (demonstrating self-discipline and self-control), as evidenced by participants responding to one of the group members getting into their space and advocating for their needs verbally. In the culminating experience of the group, participants showed corroboration of meeting ASCA Mindset M.2 and Behavior (2014) B-SMS 2, B-SS 2, B-SS 5, B.SS 6, B-SS 7, and B-SS 8 as evidenced by the way participants interacted with each other, facilitators,

and other adults at the art museum and expressed themselves positively and their needs. The corroboration of group participants meeting these ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors could justify this group being an appropriate school-based group to meet student's needs.

### **Implications**

School counselors have to address the needs of all students, and it can be difficult when the national average of student-to-school counselor ratio is almost double the recommendation from ASCA (2019). Group counseling can be utilized by school counselors to be more efficient in addressing the needs of their students. This article provides readers with a practical group example grounded in a counseling theory to address the social emotional needs of multiple diverse students at one time.

Additionally, the practical example can be adapted to meet the needs of students at other schools. This article advocates for the increased use of creative, group therapy interventions by school counselors to address the needs of multiple students at once.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

No assessments were used to collect quantitative data in this group. If assessments were conducted, there would need to be more groups conducted to increase the amount of data for statistical analysis to be conducted. Collecting qualitative data would allow for a greater understanding of the effect of the group on the students. Data could be collected on both student and facilitator experiences via weekly journals. Interviewing teachers would also shed light on the changes they may have seen in the students who participated in the group. Also, it is important to consider that the group only took place over six weeks, so this is a brief intervention in nature. In the

future the groups could be facilitated for more weeks to collect data. It would also be ideal for the researchers to collect follow-up data on the students at several time intervals after the group terminated to understand the long-term effects of the group. While the school counselor was consulted in screening, in the future the researchers would like to conduct more thorough screening. This would likely help the group members begin to create more contact sooner as one student had a particularly difficult time in the group setting.

### **Conclusion**

Play therapy is developmentally appropriate for children as it is children's language (Oaklander, 1988; Ray, 2016). In Gestalt play therapy and bibliotherapy, children are given opportunities to project their emotions and share their experiences in order to gain more insight, process their emotions, and gain a stronger sense of self (Cornett & Cornett, 1980; Oaklander, 1988). In a group setting, children have the additional opportunity to put their new awareness into action with peers. In our Gestalt play therapy group, children engaged in the Gestalt and bibliotherapy stages of change. They were able to practice using their senses to connect with themselves, their peers, the counselors, and their environment in the here and now.

In the future, we would like to track the children's behavior by implementing a quantitative assessment before the group and after the group would provide more information as to the impact. Qualitative data would also offer more insight into the benefits gained from the group experience through journaling and teacher interviews. Additionally, groups should be scheduled for longer than five-weeks. It would be ideal to have an eight-week schedule ensure that there is ample time to complete the story.

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## Appendix

**Table 1**

*Weekly Group Plan and Goals*

Group Activities	ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors	Gestalt Group Stage	Bibliotherapy Goals
Week 1			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish group norms, rules, and group name</li> <li>2. Read comic</li> <li>3. Decorate folders</li> <li>4. Power Pose</li> <li>5. Journal</li> </ol>	Mindset: M 3 Behavior Standard: B-SS 2	Stage One	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practicing tolerance</li> <li>2. Respect</li> <li>3. Acceptance of others</li> </ol>
Week 2			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete and process All About Me Poster</li> <li>2. Read comic</li> <li>3. Journal</li> <li>4. Power Pose</li> </ol>	Mindset: M 3 Behavior Standard: B-SS 2	Stage One	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creating positive self-image</li> <li>2. Ability to self-evaluate</li> <li>3. Acceptance of others</li> </ol>
Week 3			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a superhero</li> <li>2. Read comic</li> <li>3. Journal</li> <li>4. Power Pose</li> </ol>	Mindset: M 3 Behavior Standard: B-SS 6 & B-SS 7	Stage Two	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing empathy</li> <li>2. Creating a positive self-image</li> <li>3. Examining the morality of personal values</li> <li>4. Understand human behaviors and motives</li> </ol>

## Week 4

1. Create comic strip
2. Read comic
3. Journal
4. Power Pose

Mindset: M 2  
 Behavior Standard:  
 B-SMS 2 & B-SS 5

Stage  
 Three

1. Developing empathy
2. Creating a positive self-image
3. Examining the morality of personal values

## Week 5

1. Create superhero cape
2. Read comic
3. Journal
4. Power Pose

Mindset: M 2 & M 3  
 Behavior Standard:  
 B-SMS 2, B-SS 5, B-  
 SS 6 & B-SS 7

Stage  
 Three

1. Developing empathy
2. Practicing tolerance
3. Examining the morality of personal values
4. Ability to self-evaluate

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M = Mindset: M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed, M 3. Sense of belonging in the school environment.

B = Behavior;

SMS = Self-Management Skills, SS = Social Skills.

B-SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control, B-SS 5. Demonstrate ethical decision making and social responsibility, B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students, B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills, B-SS 7. Use leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse teams, B-SS 8. Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self, when necessary (ASCA, 2014).

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### **Biographical Statements**

Timothy "T.J." Schoonover is a second year PhD student at the University of Arkansas in their Counselor Education and Supervision program. He has experience working in clinical counseling settings with children and adolescents and is now completing the classes to become a licensed school counselor. He has training in creative arts and play therapy.

Dr. Margaret Hindman is an adjunct instructor for St. Bonaventure University's counselor education program and is a full-time Ozark Guidance managed by Arisa Health, non-profit, school-based counselor at a title 1 elementary school. She is currently working on becoming a registered play therapist and works closely with the school counselor at their school. She has additional training in creative arts interventions for children and adolescents.

Dr. Kristi Perryman is an Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas in their Counselor Education and Supervision program. She is a registered play therapist supervisor and licensed school counselor. She has extensive experience working with children and adolescents in schools and clinical settings.

Jena Anderson is a school counselor in Springdale, AR at a Title 1 school working with diverse children. She has been a school counselor for four years and is a fully licensed clinical counselor too. She has training in play therapy and creative arts interventions.