



Brief

The counselor's role in group peer counseling as a professional learning community in the preschool

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External management and demands towards the preschool have increased over the past decade and the preschool and create a need for collective space for professional discussions. Preschool teachers have a complicated practice where several actions are woven into each other and need methods and learning activities that support their professional learning communities. This article aims to explore the counselor's role in group peer counseling as a professional learning community by exploring the counselor's understanding of practice, in meeting her practice through video recording, with the following research question: *What characterizes a counselor's understanding of counseling in meeting own practice, and in what way can the counselor support peer counseling as a professional learning community?*

Counselors' understanding of the practice, and the counselor's role in group counseling, is discussed in the light of Bildung theory and theory of counseling as support for developing collective practice theory and experience as an active process and starting point for growth and knowledge (Hellesnes, 1992; Lauvås & Handal, 2000; Skagen, 2011). Research highlights communities of practice as important for professional development, as a space to learn, shape, and expand the collective knowledge (Evertsen et al., 2015; Hildén et al., 2021; Irvine & Price, 2014) and that the absence of a professional counselor challenges the counseling as a strategy for strengthening professional competence (Vaudt & Nolte, 2012). A counselor who asks questions that stimulate reflection can arouse participants' interest and enable them to question "established truths", initiate and follow up critical thinking about practice (Bjerkholt et al., 2014; Åsén-Nordström, 2014).

The empirical material is based on retrospective conversations with a counselor. The qualitative data has a scope of five retrospective interviews, with elements of video stimulated recall (Hodgson, 2008), carried out over nine months. The data material is analyzed based on Malterud's (2017) strategy for qualitative analyzes, *Systematic Text Condensation*, and identifies characteristics of the counselor's reflections on own practice, as balancing acts; take space/do not take space, follow structure/improvise, support/challenge and being in the situation/being in the thought. The study shows the value of flexible use of a model in the group counseling sessions, and the counselor's systematic analysis of own practice over time, but being a colleague challenges the role. A counselor as a professional authority that facilitates different understanding horizons, and the challenge of culture and practice, can be of great value to preschool teachers in meeting increased external management and demands.

Keywords: *counselor's role; group peer counseling; preschool; professional learning communities*