THE EFFECTS OF THE NON-DIRECTIVE INTERVENTION (NDI) ON PRESERVICE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' SELF-ESTEEM, SELF-EFFICACY AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Alexandros Georgopoulos,
Constantinos Vouyoukas[i]
Faculty of Education, University of Thessaloniki,
Educational Tower, University Campus,
Thessaloniki 54124, Greece

Abstract:
Non-Directive Intervention (NDI) is an experiential method of group facilitation, founded by Michel Lobrot. According to this method, the group facilitators intervene in a non-directive way. The aim of this research was to investigate the influence of the NDI on the personal growth, general self-efficacy and self-esteem of pre-service preschool teachers. Ninety-three undergraduate students participated in the research. Results of the present research work showed that students' personal growth, general self-efficacy and self-esteem were enhanced at the end of the sessions. Results are discussed within the NDI experiential learning framework.

Keywords: experiential education, non-directive intervention, tertiary education, teacher education, self-efficacy, self-esteem, personal growth

1. Introduction

Non-Directive Intervention (NDI) is an experiential method of group facilitation founded by Lobrot (1974). Its roots rest with the Lewinian T-groups and the psychotherapeutic and educational work of Carl Rogers. We owe to Kurt Lewin the first systematic research work on the style of group leadership. The authoritarian, the democratic and the laissez faire styles resulted to different degrees of work production, of aggressive or cooperative behavior and of the degree of satisfaction among the group members (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939/1999). Their findings did have an enormously deep effect on the future research and possibly the laissez faire leadership style might have been the inspiration for the conception of the "laboratory method" and the T-group. It was for the first time conceived and applied at Bethel, Maine in 1947, in order to "*meet the needs of the post-World War II world*", namely to initiate a deeper discussion

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[i] Correspondence: email ageorgop@nured.auth.gr, costasv@nured.auth.gr

on the issue of democracy and a new sense of identity and connectedness, which were strongly destabilized by the technological advances and the intense social mobility.

The results on the experimentation on T-groups showed that knowledge could be originated from the learner's experiences with feedback provided by the members of the group (Bradford, 1976). According to Lewin's followers, group facilitators should act in a neutral and non-directional way, and only give feedback on group dynamics phenomena. That approach proved that there is something more than cognitive elements to be present for knowledge to spring out of educational settings (Weis, Hanson, & Arnesen, 2009: 90).

Carl Rogers was a philosopher and psychotherapist who organised and facilitated the 'encounter groups' in accordance to empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard principles. In those groups he was trying to create a safe, non-threatening and trustful atmosphere so that the participants to be able to express themselves freely and 'grow' (Rogers, 1954). Rogers central concept called 'growth' has to do with the inherent potential immanent in all individuals which permits them to develop themselves and reach self- realization (Rogers, 1961). Therefore, psychotherapy and education should not direct the client or the student towards a specific aim but instead clear the road to be followed from hurdles to enable the person to proceed towards growth.

Both Rogers and Lewin were puzzled about the way group facilitators should interact with the group to avoid the imposition of their views on the members and permit the participants to express themselves as authentically as possible. Being deeply puzzled with that specific kind of authoritarianism, Rogers and Lewin tried to reduce their own influence on them. Unfortunately, that is a rather unrealistic duty (Carew, 2009, as cited in Knight, 2014:164; Snyders, 1975; Lobrot, 2007) considering that even a simple gaze or body posture exerts an influence. Furthermore, denying the facilitator's opportunity to behave like the rest of the group members is 'absurd' (Dewey, 1938/1998: 65-66), since we exclude the most experienced member of the group of the opportunity to contribute to the educational product.

Therefore, referring to the *"let's reduce our influence on the participants!"* principle, the NDI method is not to be understood and applied in an educational setting where the facilitators are 'absent', but they have to contribute with knowledge, proposals and planning (Lobrot, 2007). Consequently, the group facilitators ought to intervene and, provided that they have been listening carefully to that group's desires, they propose commensurate activities to the group (Bakirtzis, 2002). That exactly is the ingredient 'par excellence' of the NDI's non-directional method: the facilitators should listen to and concomitantly focus their attention on the desires of the group, as those are perceived and expressed *by the group participants themselves* and finally propose ways to express them, instead of the Rogerian simple 'acceptance' of them (Lobrot, 1974).

Michel Lobrot, a professor at the University of Paris VIII, founded the method of Non-Directive Intervention (NDI), a central point of which has to do with the human emotions. According to Lobrot (2007), emotions do not have only an instrumental role, i.e. to inform the individual about the environment and lead him to a specific reaction

serving the aim of survival as Darwin might suggest, but he ascribes also an intrinsic value to them.

NDI philosophy perceives emotions as the lived situations of holistic experiences involving the 'whole' of somebody's existence, being deeply touched and overwhelmed by them. During that holistic experience people learn and develop themselves. They perceive the experience as absolutely relevant to them and they produce the kind of engagement, which is vital for learning (Park, Holloway, Arendtsz, Bempechat, & Li, 2012; Young, 2010). In the NDI method the facilitators' proposals are constructed in such a way as to assist the participants to reach their desires. To accomplish that, the group should have the freedom to decline from accepting those proposals. In that case the participants either try to transform the unwanted proposal along with the facilitators, or even ask to be withdrawn, since learning is a response to environmental stimulus "*with the subject's internal motivations and desires inextricably intertwined with it*" (Lobrot, 1989: 7-8).

That is Lobrot's proposed remedy for what both Lewin and Rogers were concerned with, namely the authoritarian atmosphere into which the knowledge transfer violates participants' freedom. Lobrot (1989) distinguishes between imposition of somebody's opinions on others and simple exertion of influence on them, suggesting that resistance against the first does not imply rejection of the second.

Lastly, NDI's philosophy posits the fluidity of the identity which is shaped and reshaped through the conflict and synthesis of the different elements of our internal world when we interact with the external world. According to that epistemological approach people are not docile individuals or statistical units serving the elites purposes or following impersonal historical laws, but active persons who negotiate their social roles. That is why the purpose of the group facilitation is to create new lived experiences, out of which the desires of the participants emerge. The concomitant elaboration of them in order to explore, amplify and enrich them, is exactly what authoritarianism (and authoritarian educational systems) is trying to nullify (Lobrot, 1974). That continuous transformation of our identities and the effort to satisfy desires is a procedure through which society itself is transformed.

Agreeing with the previous rationale is the fact that people coming out of the T-group were usually agents of democratic change, able to contribute to the transformation of whatever institution they would return to afterwards, in their personal or professional life (Benne, 1976: 29). The T- group showed itself to have a huge potential, influencing the trainees not only about group dynamics aspects, but it triggered their personal growth and empowered them in many aspects. For Rogers (1980), the personal growth domains (empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard) are not specified in advance as goals, since the individuals need to discover them for themselves. Personal growth in this sense is context-free, since the personal skills acquired are applied in a variety of situations, whereas personal development is more likely to involve practice in particular skills, which may or may not be transferable to other contexts (Irving & Williams, 1999). In this way, personal growth is judged in terms of values.

Empowerment is a multidimensional construct, which includes the development of one's personal sense of control, efficacy and self-esteem, as well as a critical understanding of one's environment (Speer, 1999; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). Bandura (1977) has conceptualized self-efficacy as being either task specific or domain specific. However, some researchers have also conceptualized a generalized sense of self-efficacy that refers to a broad sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful or challenging situations (Schwarzer & Jerulasem, 1995). Rosenberg (1965) has defined self-esteem as a sense of personal value and the experience of being able to cope with the basic challenges of life and be worthy of happiness. Self-esteem induces feelings, beliefs and emotions of oneself (Hewitt, 2009).

We believe that personal growth and empowerment in terms of increasing one's general self-efficacy and self-esteem, constitute two main areas in which the use of experiential method of group facilitation may show significant results in its application to tertiary settings. There is some application of the experiential education methods in tertiary institutions (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001; Kolb & Kolb, 2005) but there is no systematic research work specifically on the application of the NDI approach and the simultaneous influence of it on the personal growth, general self-efficacy and self-esteem of pre-service preschool teachers, which was the aim of our research work.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research question
Does the NDI approach enhance pre-service preschool teachers' personal growth, self-esteem and self-efficacy?

2.2 Participants
Ninety-three undergraduate students participated in 13 experiential three-hour weekly sessions of the free elective module 'Experiential Education' where methods and technics inspired by the NDI theory were applied, during the autumn and spring semesters of the academic year 2016-2017, at the Department of Early Childhood Education. Eighty-seven of them were female and 6 were male. Among them 52 were enrolled at the third year of their studies and 42 at the fourth year. Their average age was 20,6 years of age.

2.3 Description and justification of the sessions
The sessions took place into a specially arranged room to meet the needs of the experiential education approach demands. There were no chairs, students were expected to sit on the floor and in a circle without shoes, a thick carpet on the floor permitted relaxed body postures, a CD player was used to produce music to accompany the activities. The sessions were facilitated by two persons (a university professor and a therapist) who were NDI trained facilitators. They would usually start a discussion in order to 'read' the desires of the participants and later on they would try

to propose commensurate activities. For instance, if members of the group expressed the desire to speak about an incident that made them angry, the facilitators would propose a role play on that specific issue. If the group did not like the idea, the facilitators would step back and either try to transform the proposal turning to the group itself and ask for alternative ideas, or the group and the facilitators would abandon the proposal altogether. The non-directedness ingredient meant that students initiated, decided upon and were accountable for the results (Carver, 1996: 10) along with the facilitators. The emergent desires are mainly those that are related to pleasure and satisfaction springing out of learning, creating, communicating and being sociable, and the ones which bring out negative emotions, like fear, anger, sadness, desperation, etc. Concomitant expression of those emotions was facilitated through various methods: first, through all kind of creative activities, like visual arts, automatic writing, body expression, role play, painting, Moreno's psychodrama or theatrical improvisation.

Second, by leading the group participants into imaginary situations. One of those was e.g. through guided dreams. All students were asked to take a body posture, as relaxed as possible, close their eyes if they want and one of the facilitators would start a narrative. That situation would instigate mental images in order to simulate the sensory perception of sights, sounds, tastes or smells and movements, along with the concomitant emotions. All those thoughts, images, emotions, were later on reflected upon and discussed in detail, usually after an automatic writing (or drawing) "outburst" immediately after finishing the dream.

Third, through activities aiming to facilitate the expression and communication among the members of the group to the fullest. For instance, a role play was proposed in order to help our students to express themselves when a discussion about emotions reached a peak point. The group was told to split in small groups and each one undertook to depict an emotion with a frozen image which would be the initial scene of a short skit to be played by the small group members. The scenario was not revealed to the big group; consequently its members were called upon to guess. Comments, speculations, different perspectives were followed by the revelation of the scenario and the final reflection were contributing a lot towards our students' emotional, cognitive and psychomotor expression

For all those methods ample time was provided and members were accompanied into their reflection upon what they felt and thought during and after the above named activities (Lobrot, 2007: 127-128).

The facilitators were playing a vital role in listening, proposing and then accompanying the members of the group, during the realization of the proposals, either because of the need to reorient a proposal towards a more acceptable form, or simply because they need the members emotional support to explore sometimes unknown landscapes of their psychic construction, not to mention aspects of the self that the person itself doesn't feel comfortable with. Last but not least, facilitators encouraged group members to finally reflect in order to become conscious of their internal (thoughts, emotions etc) and external (group dynamics) world and assist them through the non-judgemental and empathic use of the Rogerian "reformulation", which serves

in that case both as a mirror for the participant to check his/her own saying and as an empowerment tool.

2.4 Data collection tools

2.4.1 Self-esteem scale

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965): is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree (e.g. 'On the whole, I am satisfied with myself'). RSES has been standardized in the Greek population on sample of 652 undergraduate students (Galanou, Galanakis, Alexopoulos, & Darviri, 2014) (a: 0.809). In the present research, RSES reliability (a) was 0.74.

2.4.2 Self-efficacy scale

General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995): is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale – from not at all true to exactly true (e.g. 'I can usually handle whatever comes my way'). GSE Greek translation (*Glynou, Schwarzer, & Jerusalem, 1994) was distributed in 100 individuals with* a: 0.78. In the present research GSE reliability was a: 0.67.

2.4.3 Personal growth scale

A personal growth scale was constructed by the authors, which was based on Rogerian theory of personal growth. Items were used from the Person-centered Attitudes Questionnaire by Figl (2008), which was applied in her doctoral thesis, among other tools, for evaluating the effects of an active learning course on communication and soft skills in project management on the participants' personal growth, according to the Rogerian philosophy. It consists of items on students' evaluation of their personal growth accomplishment in the three domains of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. The personal growth scale was first translated into Greek by the authors and then back-translated by a bilingual postgraduate student in the Department of Early Childhood Education. It was first piloted in an independent sample of 16 first-grade university students to improve clarity in the wording of the questions. The final version of the scale, which was applied in this research, included 15 items answered on a four-point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree (a: 0.85) (five questions for congruence, a: 0.76, e.g. 'I encounter others as the person who I really am', five questions for empathy, a: 0.72, e.g. 'I think I am understanding towards others' and five questions for unconditional positive regard, a: 0.71, e.g. It's easy for me to accept others').

2.5 Procedure

For the data to be collected, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Scales measuring self-efficacy, self-esteem, and personal growth were distributed to and completed anonymously by the students in the second and third session of every semester course. The same scales were distributed

again in the last two sessions of the semester course. Students were asked to keep journals to their thoughts, emotions, observations on the group dynamics as a safe and authentic outlet without fear of judgement or need of justification.

2.6 Analyses

Mann Whitney tests, after a significant omnibus Krustal-Wallis test, were used to explore differences between the initial and final scores of student's self-esteem, self-efficacy and personal growth. The observed significance value (p-value) in all non-parametric statistical hypotheses testing procedures was estimated by using the Monte Carlo simulation method. This method leads to valid inferential conclusions even in cases where the methodological presuppositions (random sampling, independent observations) of the non-parametric tests are not satisfied (Mehta & Patel, 1996).

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Self-efficacy results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived general self-efficacy according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p=0.000). Students' general self-efficacy score was significantly increased at the end of the group dynamics course (Table 1). There are reports about experiential activities, which make children more effective in problem solving (e.g. Cornelius-White, 2007; Jiusto & Dibiasio, 2006; Wolfe & Samdahl, 2005). Critical thinking and self-knowledge, inquiry and problem solving are deemed by researchers as higher order thinking skills which are sidelined in favor of the lower order thinking skills (e.g. recall of information) (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian et al., 2001). Teachers focus on the latter in their effort to guarantee their pupils success in the tests, without necessarily improving their learning (Ives & Obenchain, 2006: 63). In the present research students' self-efficacy was enhanced since, for example, they managed to express their opinion publicly after critically observing their peers succeeding through sustained effort. In this way, they solved the problem of their publicly showed assertiveness deficiency critically and not just because they recalled the given information (Botha & Coetzee, 2016). It seems that the perceived self-efficacy can be enhanced with the self-directedness facilitation ingredient and result to high quality learning (e.g. self-knowledge). The following student's excerpt describes what was mentioned above: *"Going back home after that session, I felt prepared to face anyone and be able to claim everything I wanted, but I have not claimed so far, thinking that perhaps someone in my close environment is not in agreement or delighted with my decision"*.

3.2 Self-esteem results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived self-esteem according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p=0.000). Students' self-esteem score was significantly increased at the end of the group dynamics course (Table 2). Research has demonstrated an association between experiential

education programs and increased self-esteem of the participants (e.g. Cornelius-White, 2007: 131; Vasilopoulos & Brouzos, 2012; Wong, Lau, & Lee, 2012) despite reservations of other researchers reprimanding practitioners who uncritically claim a boost of the self-esteem of their students without taking into account the creation of a 'proper' values context (Higgins, 2009: 51). In this research work, students increased their self-esteem due to the safe and non-threatening environment created during the experiential education weekly sessions, or because of the group dynamics. There are longitudinal studies reporting that membership in experiential learning groups boosts self-esteem because people take pride in, and derive meaning from (Jetten, Branscombe, Haslam, Haslam, Cruwys, et al., 2015), and that peer acceptance can protect self-esteem against the negative effects of various kinds (Birkeland, Breivik, & Wold, 2014). The student self-directivity opportunities during the sessions would boost their self-esteem, due to their self-determination being absolutely expressed, practiced and developed, as the following student's excerpt from her journal shows: "*as time went by, doubt and suspicion gave way to trust and positive energy. Shame and fear were replaced by comfort and security. Our passive participation at the beginning became more energetic over time and 'colored' the room and texture of the course*".

3.3 Personal growth results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived personal growth according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p=0.000). Students' personal growth score was significantly increased at the end of the group dynamics course (Table 3). There is research work showing enhanced personal growth after the participation to experiential learning programs (e.g. Martin & Leberman, 2005: 50; Martin & Legg, 2002: 29; Robinson, 2013). Students in this research point out the derogative way their acquaintances react to the experiential program due to the lack of exams and they regret the fact it lasted for too short a time. Their comments concur with other research claiming that better results would come out if experiential programs could last longer due to the maturational character of the self-directed learning process of these programs (Kocaman, Dicle, & Ugur, 2009: 286), if the experiential learning could be applied as a "*whole school approach*", if "*the lack of examination in an exam driven culture*" was not reducing "*its status in the perception of teachers and students alike*" into a "*doss*" class and if "*the teaching staff was better trained*" (Mannix McNamara, Sharon, Didier, & Lynch, 2012: 203, 207). The following "empathy", "unconditional positive regard" and "congruence" are to be considered as subcategories of the "personal growth" category.

3.4 Empathy results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived empathy according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p=.000). Students' empathy score was significantly increased at the end of the group dynamics course (Table 4). There is a record of studies, which indicate that empathy can be developed through experiential learning approaches (e.g. Cruz & Patterson, 2005;

George, 2015; Vanlaere, Coucke, & Gastmans, 2010). All in all, empathy along with non-directivity and positive relationships is among the teacher variables, which are associated with positive student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007: 134). In this research, an attempt was made to develop empathy in the participant students, and as the following excerpt shows, that aim was accomplished: "*As she was speaking to us, she not only described the event but managed to impart her feelings to us as well. As I was listening, I was feeling that I was getting into her shoes*".

Moreover, it should be noted that our research work shows that the empathy ingredient of personal growth expressed as "*actively listening the other*", was enhanced. We received self-evaluation reports on the part of our students that after they were offered the opportunity to "*experience the value of being deeply listened to, without interruption*" in the same way like trainees counsellors (McCarthy, 2011: 184) or psychotherapists (Rogers, 1980: 7-10) they were able to transfer the active listening skill into their relationships with friends or in their family context. In this way, we can contribute to the "heated" discussion concerning the experiential education-personal growth relationship, by allying with research workers supporting this relationship (Robinson, 2013: 54; Taniguchi and Freeman, 2004; Priest and Gass, 1997). Despite the reservations that those claims should be treated with skepticism (Brookes, 2003, as cited by Robinson, 2013: 55), due to the fact that those experiences have been largely anecdotal (Sheard and Golby, 2006: 189) and the disagreement by eg Wolfe και Samdahl (2005) who claim there is a tacit (and baseless) assumption in the literature on the skills acquired being transferable into the everyday life, we found exactly the opposite.

3.5 Unconditional positive regard results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived unconditional positive regard of the other people according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p=0.000). Students' unconditional positive regard score was significantly increased at the end of the group dynamics course (Table 5). Experiential education projects are referred to as a situation in which people can acquire an increased ability to hold multiple perspectives (Savage & Wehman, 2014: 9), which most probably is a crucial component for citizens of today. During the recent decades and because of globalization, increasingly, identities are stretched to include loyalties to wider and wider groups of people and trust needs and judgements of complete strangers (Latham, 2000, as cited in Farell, 2005: 11). Consequently, accepting the others and their opinions and behavior are of paramount importance to the point that counsellors were called to be educated on that 'urgent task' (Gerstein & Moeschberger, 2003). The following student's excerpt describes how this task was accomplished: "*(…) for any matter that concerns me, and I want to discuss it, the group will be there and will listen to me even if I regard it as irrelevant or unrelated with the other issues we are discussing*".

3.6 Congruence results

Statistical significant difference was detected between the initial and final scores of students' perceived congruence according to a series of Mann Whitney tests (p<.001).

Students' congruence score was significantly increased at the end of the experiential education course (Table 6). There is a number of reasons we reckon that the participating students enhanced their congruence; first, their self-directedness, which meant more authentic involvement (Fourcade & Go, 2012: 202), second, the analysis of real world experiences (Carver, 1996) which constructs a more vivid relationship with knowledge and third, the trusting and non-threatening group atmosphere developed (Rogers, 1954). Experiencing original circumstances and situations and not just reading about them was a source of congruence according to Joplin (1995, as cited in Southcott, 2004: 9-10). One of the most characteristic examples of authentic reaction came from a student who admitted in the last session of the semester that every time an activity was proposed by the facilitators she had a dilemma whether to participate or not, and although she never participated, she was invariably changing her mind afterwards. Another student was genuine enough to write about her difficulty to address somebody else publicly as follows: *"When we were told that we would first get to know each other and then introduce one to the rest of the group, I was overwhelmed with feelings of embarrassment and anxiety because I am quite shy as a person. As my turn came, I felt a shiver running through my body and my pulses going up more and more. After shivering I managed to present my fellow mate without fainting and I finally felt the burden leaving me."*

4. Conclusions

The NDI experiential pedagogical methods of group facilitation towards learning and growth has shown to promote simultaneously the self-efficacy, self-esteem and personal growth of kindergarten student teachers. Its main methodological instruments are listening to the group's desires, proposing commensurate activities, accompanying students during those activities via reformulation and reflecting on what the group felt and thought. The self-directivity principle gives students the opportunity to express themselves, helps them out towards revealing their subjectivity, securing in that way that their point of view and any concomitant action are considered seriously. Most probably, that personal/subjective element involved in experiential education, i.e. taking into account students' perceptions and preferences, creates a strong intrinsic motivation for them to learn (Almaz & Shige, 2010: 148, 149), and is responsible for the differences between the conventional and the experiential education (e.g. Ives & Obenchain, 2006; Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). The holistic experiences lived by students and the empathic attitude prevailing during the sessions, along with the 'unconditional positive regard' and a congruent facilitator are parameters able to make the participant students 'grow' and develop their self-efficacy and self-esteem. The results of the present research work show that students absorbed the facilitators methodological attributes, in other words they 'learned' what the facilitators indirectly 'taught' them. That fact reveals the huge educational potential of NDI. Although there are not many articles on experiential teacher education courses (e. g. Hoban, 1999; Ives & Obenchain, 2006), there is some research work in which prospective kindergarten teachers explored (Bullough & Kauchak, 1997, as cited in Hattingh & de Kock, 2008: 323) and developed

both their personal and professional identity transforming themselves by being exposed to and challenged with new experiences (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004: 120; Mannix McNamara et al., 2012). Our research work shows that we managed to re-educate (Benne, 1976) adult students in order to become more conscious and replace or transcend ways of thinking, valuing or behaving with new, more attractive and socially appropriate ways of living. More specifically, an attempt was made to shift the prospective kindergarten teachers identities from a traditional knowledge provider role with its powerfully perceived subject status and its concomitant teacher subject identity towards a learning facilitator role (Hattingh & de Kock, 2008), aiming at the person as a 'whole' (Bradford, 1976; Rogers, 1980: 263-292). That potential rests on the great pedagogues like Maria Montessori, Decroly, Dewey, etc. who insisted on the great significance of the freedom principle in education. According to them children are not to be perceived as simple objects on which one imprints knowledge, but as human beings who cannot create, grow, learn, without freedom (Lobrot, autumn 2009, personal communication with corresponding author). NDI is inspired by the Lewinian T-groups and the Rogerian encounter groups, but opposite to the previous groups' facilitators reluctance to intervene in the group, NDI facilitators dare to make proposals. According to the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the non-directivity principle, there is no logic in denouncing any influence from another person as abusive and manipulative, since any kind of intervention is automatically non-directive if it responds to a desire, a request, or an expectation of the members of the group.

4.1 Implications for education

Most of the learning theories are taught to university students in a decontextualized frame. Therefore, introducing courses in tertiary settings where students would be learners themselves acquiring personal meaning would be useful, and experiential learning can serve to that direction (Nkhoma, Sriratanaviriyakul, Hiep, & Lam, 2014; Raffan, 1995). Furthermore, integrating experiential methods within teachers' professional development is a promising approach (Behr & Temmen, 2012; Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016). Last but not least, despite reservations expressed about skills learned in personal growth 'microcosm' groups, which are not easily transferable to the outside larger world (Robinson, 2013: 54) and taking into account other researchers and facilitators who point to the opposite direction (Peterson, DeAngelo, Mack, Thompson, Cooper, & Sesma, 2014; Yalom, 1995), such courses will be able to enhance students skills related to growth.

4.2 Limitations of the present study

The vast majority of the study sample consists of females, which are usually more interested to the experiential approaches (Mannix McNamara et al., 2012: 211) and there is some need for more research work on more gender balanced samples to reach more objective conclusions. Also, the results of the present work cannot be generalized due to the small and convenient sample size. Furthermore, the self-evaluation reports from which we extracted excerpts were only reflecting students' subjective opinions.

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