

Reviews

A Quarter Century of Classics (1978-2004)
Capturing the theory, practice, and spirit of social work with groups
Edited by Andrew Malekoff and Roselle Kurland
Haworth Press, 2005, 266 pp
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A Quarter Century of Classics presents a collection of seventeen journal articles that have appeared in *Social Work with Groups* from the 1970s through to 2004. Kurland and Malekoff have assembled a range of writing from practitioners and academics and while claiming not to cover all areas of groupwork, this text provides an extensive assortment offering insight and guidance into the world of social groupwork. For both practitioner and student, this collection offers accessible material to enhance knowledge and practice. The material covered is diverse and would be helpful to those new to the field of groupwork as well as offering plenty of learning and reflection opportunities for more experienced workers.

The authors posit a variety of approaches, theories and practice techniques, offering discussions around group process and formation, open and closed groups, time distribution and purpose and intervention - to name just a few. The writings present case examples to explore the efficacy and appropriateness of certain intervention methods, which are punctuated by challenges and learning-in-action as the authors illustrate their experiences and insights. The writing on the whole is passionate and clear in its delivery and commitment to groupwork. The presence of contradiction and challenge from differing agency perspectives and practice approaches sit comfortably alongside those offering a more homogenous philosophy. The reader is invited to make up her/his own mind.

For example, Roselle Kurland's article on 'Planning- The Neglected Component of Group Development' examines the importance of planning and preparation in the pre-group process and discusses the implications for practice, when this cog in the wheel is absent. In an article by Alex Gitterman, entitled 'Building Mutual Support in Groups', the reader is provided with a valuable toolkit of skills and interventions for building group mutual support. Gitterman focuses on the role and tasks of the worker and provides helpful strategies for managing and overcoming potential challenges within the group.

Casework in a group and groupwork are usefully defined in Roselle Kurland and Robert Salmon's article on 'Group Work vs. Casework in a Group: Principles and Implications for Teaching and Practice'. This work highlights a number of distinctions that may be beneficial to practice analysis and development. The authors further explore Hartford's concept of *aggregational therapy of individuals* and draw cautious attention to the assumption that groupwork benefits all.

'The Use of Purpose in On-going Activity Groups: A Framework for Maximizing the Therapeutic Impact' is explored by Whitney Wright who presents a sensitive portrayal of activity within groups and demonstrates how dual-purpose groups can unite creativity and personal growth when thoughtfully facilitated. A similarly sensitive article on the impact of race and gender issues on groups is provided by Alan Brown and Tara Mistry. This work illustrates the group's position as symbolic of wider society. In particular, the authors explore the issue of power, dominance and oppression and the importance of group composition. They also look at the question of mixed and non-mixed gender and race groups and offer valid contextual reasoning for both.

However, while this book provides a breadth of examples of workings in the field, there are omissions worth noting. Combating inequality and prejudice as anti-oppressive practice are examined in one article, but largely ignored as important practice issues throughout the remaining articles. Service-user feedback and evaluation are undoubtedly crucial in developing and maintaining good, effective practice and with the prevalence of outcomes and targets high on the current political agenda, it is surprising to find this area unaccounted for in its own right. Although quantifying personal growth can prove challenging, I feel this collection would have benefited from an article

dedicated to evaluative methods and service-user consultation.

Despite this, I feel this collection offers a valuable resource for reference and encouragement and serves to remind us of the value and opportunity that groupwork has to offer.

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Growth and Development Through Group Work
C.J.Carson, A.S.Fritz, E.Lewis, J.H.Ramey, & D.T.Sugiuchi
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Conference reports can be like other people's holiday photos - appetising for those who were there, but cold cabbage for others. This symposium took place one month after the attack on the World Trade Center and a central theme was social justice. It will have been a memorable experience for those who were there. There is no trace of this, however, in the 13 chapters, which are diverse in topic and quality. Some are valuable records, which cluster round the theme of social groupwork and its relevance to the modern world: the rest are slight pieces.

The first four are of historical interest. One reviews the work, from the 1940's to 1983, of Ruby Pernell, who died in 2001. This is an extended obituary, but valuable because it sheds light on the early hopes vested in social group work after World War II. This theme is focused in a later chapter on the educational impact of social group work in Germany after Hitler. There is a celebratory chapter about the work of Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, and especially the work, from the 1890's to the 1920's, of Rachele Yarros, a political exile from Ukraine. This is a venture into the prehistory of group work, which shows clearly its origins in political and medical activism. Finally, Helen Northen offers an excellent introduction to research in

groupwork from its earliest years.

If these represent photos of the Taj Mahal, the Bridge of Sighs and the Parthenon, Part II provides a couple of landscapes: a blurry chapter on the value of conflict as an opportunity for learning; and a colourful polemic against the 'residual' model of social work (with people who have problems), rather than a 'welfare for all' model.

After that we move to snaps of the family doing things. The four chapters in Part III address educational issues. They are all accounts of particular programmes. One outlines attempts to help students through groupwork to recognise the social causes that underlie individual problems. A second records a seminar which brought students and teaching staff together under the banner of 'restorative education': people were obviously communicating, but it is not quite clear what they restored. The third sets out to show how groupwork skills were taught in 'a distance learning classroom', but this concept is out of focus. It seems to mean the students of two universities sharing ideas by computer, and meeting to evaluate the experience. The fourth describes a four-session seminar for field instructors (practice supervisors), which clearly identified and met a need. These all have the classic holiday photo message of "this is us doing interesting things", but the viewers are left to find what meaning they can.

Finally, there are three accounts of specific groups. In one the workers gave themselves the handicap of working with members whose language they did not speak (poor women in a Mexican community). They show that it is possible to perform this feat, but not whether there might be better ways of reaching the same goals. The remaining two chapters are about groupwork in medical contexts: one with people suffering from ulcerative colitis and one with supporters of people undergoing a bone marrow transplant. These are all positive pictures of useful groups, but again the analysis is thin.

One is left at the end with a sense of exasperation. The multiplicity of images is attractive. Obviously groupwork can be fun. It can make people feel better. We should all think about doing it more. But somehow one has been excluded from the party. And this of course is what conference reports do. The formal papers were starters. The real work went on between sessions, in reaction to this material, or to the real world which is coming through the windows or the airwaves. The deeper analysis developed through questions and discussion, as

people shared their own experience, parallel or perpendicular to that of the speakers. I hope this happened in Ohio in October 2001. But one desperately wants to ask: after all that, what had you learned about social group work ? what new things do you have to tell us ? how can we use this to make our world better ? how is it all relevant to 9/11 ?

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