

## Reviews

*Groupwork Practice in Social Work*  
Trevor Lindsay and Sue Orton  
Exeter, Learning Matters, 2008, 140pp  
ISBN 9781844450862 (pbk)

How exciting it is to see a book published 'specifically to support students on social work degrees' (back cover). As the authors note (p. IX), the place of groupwork in social work syllabi is far from secure. Surely, a learning aide may serve a vital purpose in promoting the subject.

The contents of the book are divided into nine chapters. The first focuses on what is groupwork. The chapter talks in everyday terms about purposes of groupwork, its advantages and its limitations. The second chapter is concerned with planning the group. Various issues with which most groupwork struggle are identified and some are discussed in great detail, but not the actual methods the workers will employ. The chapter culminates in the 'Group Planner': a list of twenty one issues a worker needs to address before starting a new group. Facilitation and co-facilitation is the subject of the third chapter. Although this is not declared, the emphasis here is on contributions made by humanistic psychology; a heart-warming change for the current reviewer. After that we go back to setting up the group in the fourth chapter. The main theme is membership negotiation and the preliminary contracts. This is followed by chapter 5 which is dedicated to group processes. A certain understanding of the term is attempted, the influence of psychosynthesis is evident (but not acknowledged) and Tuckman's stages of group development, as well as those suggested by Schutz, are presented. Chapter 6 may be particularly helpful to current practitioners as it deals with programming and activities. Most of the leading sources about this topic are presented and a discussion of the order of interventions during a single session is offered. Discussion of issues of power and oppression is available in chapter 7. Matters related to any form of oppression during every stage of groupwork are raised with special reference to

users' involvement. Chapter 8 is an attempt to deal with unexpected or unhelpful responses of group members. Various sources of difficulties groupworkers may face are listed, some responses are discussed and the importance of resorting to groupwork consultation is acknowledged. The book ends with discussion of monitoring, recording and evaluating practice. Well known sources of qualitative evaluation are introduced – ending with an extensive 'pro forma for tuning in to a groupwork session' (p. 128) and one for 'written evaluation of a group session' (p.130).

Strengths of this book are rather evident: the language is very conversational, and so – renders this book extremely accessible. Each chapter is prefaced with a list of requirements of the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (NOSSW). The authors always state that the following text will help readers 'begin' to meet these requirements. Activities for independent reflection, research summaries and case studies are liberally offered throughout the book, which may encourage active participation by readers. Each chapter ends with a summary and further reading and these may facilitate continuous education and training. Overall, the references to humanistic psychology can be seen as refreshing – but this is part of my own bias.

## Reference

Tuckman, B.W. and Jensen, M.A. (1977) Stages of small group development revisited. *Group and Organizational Studies* ,2, 419-427.

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*Empowerment, participation and social work*

Robert Adams

Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, (4th edition) 2008, xvii+238pp

ISBN 9780230019997

This is a revised and substantially updated edition of Adam's work on empowerment and social work which has been published and revised 3 times previously. It was first produced in 1990 and revised in 1996, 2003 and once more in 2008. It covers in-depth discussion of empowerment in a range of settings – self empowerment, work with individuals, groups, communities and organisations as well as empowering research. In this re-worked 2008 edition which now includes a glossary, Adams attempts to describe how empowerment is influenced by the changing global context and to incorporate newer texts on social work and empowerment. The book includes boxed texts of 'practice examples', 'commentary' and 'putting it into practice' so beloved of publishers nowadays; however in some cases he is adding to practice examples from previous editions which now seem a bit dated and not reflective of current social work concerns.

The book sets out the links and connections between participation, empowerment and power which have always been important in social work and with the increasing emphasis on social service users participating in decisions.

Whilst there are many useful elements to the book, for example the fact it addresses a variety of work settings and client groups, discussion of the links between participation and empowerment and the sections on developing an empowering organisation. I feel that it almost tries to cover too much ground and in so doing often feels like a 'hotch potch' of ideas and even at times confuses more than it clarifies. For me the major fault line is set out by Adams himself when he writes that

It is inherently contradictory to refer to empowering people through social workers employed by state agencies working in bureaucratic organisations, the balance of whose practice derives from legalisation rather than from principles laid down by a professional body, let alone from the experiences of people who use services (p.6)

For me he never adequately responds to this challenge he has set himself. This is particularly true when one considers how much social work is changing. Social care is facing tremendous upheaval and transformation with the growth of the 'personalisation' agenda and the introduction of mechanisms for social care such as individualised budgets and commissioning and with social work increasingly requiring social workers to assess eligibility and ration services. The rhetoric of choice and control is often severely limited by both for-profit services and limited services – the book does not address these concerns at all.

Whilst the previous editions of the work have been rich texts that cover both the conceptualization and practice of empowerment and social work to provide an essential resource at all levels of study; I feel with this edition it has not updated itself enough to address the very real challenges facing social work in the twenty first century – the rapidly increasing 'gap between rhetoric and reality of empowerment' (p.193); and on this occasion it might have been better to start afresh and write a new book rather than trying to up-date a work that started its life eighteen years ago.

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