

Review

Working More Creatively With Groups

Jarlath Bensen

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From the outset of the book, it is apparent that Bensen isn't writing from purely an academic detached perspective, but is honestly, and courageously opening up to the reader about his own experiences of groupwork, and the complexities and frustrations of the whole process. He acknowledges and defers to those who have mentored, worked with and influenced his thinking over the past twenty five years.

It is apparent that Bensen has been profoundly impacted by many in his career and that he continues to question and challenge himself in this gruelling process. This is I believe wonderfully illustrated at the end of the introduction, where he states the following about groupwork:

Groupwork practice refers to the conscious, disciplined, and systematic use of knowledge about the processes of collective human interaction, in order to intervene in an informed way, or promote some desired objective in a group setting. In the sense that it is used in this book, groupwork practice is a helping process designed to correspond to instances of individual and group need, based on a view of man as in constant interaction and relationship with others. Group work is a productively, healthy, and creative experience, carried out on the basis of explicit agreement, openly pursued and clearly arrived at, about the purpose and task of group, and the rights and responsibilities of members. (p.8)

The book is divided into 15 chapters, which not only take the reader through the stages of the groupwork process, but also go further and deeper in addressing the skills, techniques, intensity and unnatural processes within groups. This really is the major strength of the text,

as Bensen really addresses the complexities of working with groups.

Each chapter is divided into sections, and there are numerous questions to ponder and reflect upon. At the end of each chapter there is a review, where Bensen identifies the significant issues or concepts that he was trying to convey in the chapter. However, it should be noted that these reviews are not a brief overview. They address in-depth, complex questions, which require on the part of the reader a great deal of thought and reflection.

In the last chapter, *Keeping Your Practice Going*: Bensen, identifies six principles for those conducting groups:

- Rule 1: Avoid crucifixions
- Rule 2: Don't push the river upstream
- Rule 3: Wait quietly until the mud settles
- Rule 4: Learn to forgive yourself
- Rule 5: Cultivate goodwill
- Rule 6: Make up your own rules

For the reviewer, what was so compelling was Bensen's ability to acknowledge those who had contributed to his own growth and development, and the expansion of his own insights, wisdom and knowledge. He was also giving the groupworker permission to experiment and adopt new approaches thereby making new learning a means of informing the group process.

In the last paragraph of the book, Bensen acknowledges the difficulties he had in writing this text. But he points out the parallels to working with a group. He concedes that the process was difficult and challenging, but if one is able to let go, then the group will flourish.

For me this was a refreshing, insightful and extremely honest account of one's groupwork practice. Bensen, does not attempt to make groupwork glamorous or easy, but rather addresses the struggles and complexities and provides the reader with numerous creative options to incorporate into their own groupwork practice.

Paul Johnson
