

Mutual inspiration: Growing and mentoring the next generation of groupworkers

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Abstract: *Mentoring relationships provide mutual inspiration that enlivens the practice of social work for students as well as mentors. This paper demonstrates the significance of mentoring relationships for student group workers and teachers. Personal narratives of both students and teachers illuminate the need for groupwork mentors in social work education. Identifying as a groupwork mentor aids in the professional's ongoing reflection of their own practice, refreshing the mentor's commitment to the advancement of the field and enhancing his/her satisfaction with the work. Schools of Social Work must formalize this relationship by integrating mentoring into the curriculum.*

Keywords: *groupwork mentors; social group work advancement; mentoring relationships; social work education*

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Introduction

There have been significant shifts in the prevalence of groupwork within the field of social work over the course of the past 80 years. The pioneers of group work developed theory and practice increasing both the professionalism and teaching of groupwork . Most recent and past studies discuss how group practice is presented and taught to social work students through curriculum and field experiences.

This paper will provide an overview of the research related to developing and supporting new generations of groupworkers . Notably, through the use of personal narratives, this paper will demonstrate the significance of mentoring relationships for student groupworkers and teachers. These mentoring relationships provide mutual inspiration that enlivens the practice of social groupwork for students as well as for the mentors. In the narratives, students and teachers elaborate upon the usefulness of the mentor relationship in social work education. Identifying as a groupwork mentor aids in the professional's ongoing reflection of her/his own practice, refreshing the mentor's commitment to the advancement of the field and enhancing his/her satisfaction with the work. The formalization of mentor relationships in social work programs may enhance the quality of practice and teaching of social groupwork. The narratives speak to a manner of communication that holds teachers accountable for bringing fresh and up to date material to their students while re-energizing the instructor's desire for advancing the field. In this paper, we strive to contribute to the social work literature on the significant value of mentoring relationships for groupworkers.

Literature review

The groupwork theory and practice literature focused on in this review is categorized into three sections: a) focusing on supervision, empowerment and cohort learning; b) promoting the future growth and specialization of the groupwork field within a historical analysis and c) mentoring – a topic on which there is little empirical and qualitative social work study.

In the early years of groupwork , Kaiser (1948) listed the areas needed

to improve social work with groups including defining qualifications, trained supervisors, defining salaries and recognition of this specialized field in education settings. In the educational programs Barlow (2004) emphasizes the importance of seeing all classes as groups and layering course work on groups over a few years to facilitate expertise in the field. Supervision is also highlighted by Conyne et al, (1995) as an integral element in helping future groupworkers begin in the field. Through four student cases the authors (Conyne et al, 1995) display the importance of trust and openness in the supervision relationship as well as empowerment of those beginning their careers in groupwork . Kurland and Salmon (2006) add significantly to the groupwork literature regarding the professional development of groupwork specialists. These authors (Kurland & Salmon, 2006) review and examine the qualities and worldviews of the individuals drawn to groupwork.

As we move into the future we must also look at the past and let 'history guide us as we move forward to strengthen the place of social group work in social work' (Andrews, 2001, p. 63). In a discussion of groupwork issues for the past, present and future, Conyne (2003) writes that groupwork is an 'evolution' of therapy and that the growing necessity for group therapists will promote new literature and training standards for the field. Ward (2004) makes a case for groupworkers to 'redouble efforts to build evidence for the empirically supported understanding and application of group work' (p. 156). This movement is critical if we are to promote the future growth and specialization of the groupwork field. In her historical analysis of groupwork's place in social work, Andrews (2001) writes that

group work ideology had stood up well over time because it is rooted in a clear understanding of the realities of human lives and the human condition' (p. 62).

The significance of supervision in social work education is well documented. Group specialists have found supervision essential to the education and professional skills of groupworkers (Christensen & Kline, 2000; Conyne, et al, 1995; Linton, 2003). Conyne et al (1995) believe that the supervision of groupwork students is essential for the integration of theory and practice as well as the empowerment of groupwork students beginning their careers. In a qualitative study

looking at group therapy trainees, Murphy et al (1996) found that the relational aspects to supervision are very important to the perceived experience of trainees. Specifically, they suggest that the supervisors' transparency and way of relating to the trainee aids the groupwork student in developing his or her own 'personality' as a group facilitator. Supervision of students in a group format demonstrates positive effects. Christensen and Kline (2000) show that through group supervision, supervisees not only gained knowledge about theory and process but also 'learned about their interaction styles and gained insight into relationship issues that affected their participation' (p. 389). The cohort supervision style gives a space for parallel process, learning about groupwork theory and practice while being a member of a group. Kleinberg (1999) suggests that the format of group supervision helps to uncover and work through groupworkers' unconscious issues and patterns. Not only can this work happen in group supervision but also through graduate courses designed with this group parallel process in mind. In her discussion of a three-year plan for teaching group skills, Barlow (2004) uses the example of her group consultation course as an influential part of her groupwork education. She writes, 'some of the most powerful learning I ever experienced in graduate school occurred in this weekly meeting, when, alongside my peers, I learned how to expose my most vulnerable flaws' (p. 116). This resounds as an opportunity for mentors to model for students the sharing of stories and lessons learned from clinical practice; the successes and the challenges.

While the social work literature on mentoring is quite limited, slightly more research on this topic appears in the fields of psychology and counseling education. This research highlights that supervision and mentoring of beginning groupworkers are two different mediums of teaching and empowering. Johnson (2002) writes that 'a good mentor discerns a protégé's personal and vocational dream, endorses this as realistic, and offers an environment conducive to facilitating this dream' (p. 89). In their book on clinical supervision, Bernard and Goodyear (2004) discuss the differences between supervision and mentoring. The authors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004) suggest that the supervisor role is one that includes evaluation and gatekeeping while the mentoring role is one of support, encouragement and advocacy. From the perspective of a groupwork counseling student, McCue-Herlihy's (1996) paper highlights her experience of being mentored by a groupwork professor.

Essentially she learned best from her mentor's 'gentle probing [and] corrective feedback' (p.171). McCue-Herlihy reports that she felt empowered by the mentor offering her 'strong encouragement to become involved [in groups] and the mentor affording [her] group leadership opportunities,' as well as her willingness to open herself up to observation and questioning by students (p. 171).

Although individuals can be both supervisors and mentors there are distinct differences between the two roles. Supervisors are responsible for teaching and training supervisees within their fields. Milne et al (2008) highlighted 26 supervision interventions and grouped them into categories such as teaching, providing corrective feedback and observing. Mentoring may include these interventions but also includes a more in depth understanding of the student. Barnett et al (2001) discuss the mentoring relationship as going beyond that of a clinical supervisor. They describe mentoring as, 'reaching out to students, getting to know them and their goals, needs and plans' (p.222). Mentors provide opportunities for networking and professional development, as well as helping students define their career goals all while providing emotional support (Brown et al, 2008). It appears that the knowledge, connection and support mentors provide students are different from those gained in a supervisory relationship. However, both relationships are essential to the continued development of competent and inspired group social workers.

Although much of the research highlights the positive experiences of both students and teachers, the authors do not want to imply that all mentoring experiences are represented in this light. Most individuals have experienced relationships in life that resulted in negative experiences, so it is not a stretch to infer that some mentoring relationships are not productive within the social groupwork field specifically. Johnson and Huwe (2002) consider how mentoring relationships in graduate school can be dysfunctional and problematic. With continued research on the effects of mentoring in social groupwork it will be important to understand the breadth of the mentoring experience both positively and negatively.

The project

The following narratives were shared during two groupwork discussion meetings. Students were invited to attend these meetings for the purpose of sharing their personal stories. Attendance and/or participation at the meeting on the part of the student was completely voluntary. Specifically students were asked to discuss their experience with groupwork including past experience, reasons for deciding to complete the groupwork certificate and how, if at all, mentors impacted on their experience either negatively or positively. In attendance were both groupwork students and faculty within the social work program. Facilitators explained to students who attended the meeting that its purpose was to inform a narrative paper aimed at understanding more about the students' experiences within the groupwork program. This undertaking was not designed as a research study per se but rather as an illustration of the individual's experiences. Further study and inclusion of research methodology in this area would greatly add to the ability to generalize the impact of mentoring relationships. Meeting attendees were also advised that their narratives might be used in a scholarly paper and that their information would remain anonymous. The students who agreed to participate and also let their stories be utilized, stated so in writing. Students were also given the option of answering these questions anonymously over the telephone with the student co-author. Two narratives were shared via telephone conversations; all other narratives were shared face to face in these two meetings.

The stories

As previously mentioned, most of the following narratives were shared in a dialogue with other students and groupwork teachers in a group meeting setting. It is imperative that we find a way to measure the impact of sharing these stories between new groupworkers and the more seasoned mentors. The narratives raise key questions. What next steps happen for the workers and teachers after the telling of the stories? What seeds get planted that will in fact provide growth to the social groupwork field of practice and education? Does it matter that students are able to advance through social work school identifying as groupwork specialists

or groupworkers? What impact does experiencing this learning with a group of their own have on the students and on the teachers? All of these questions require further exploration, research and study. We see these stories as laying some groundwork, a foundation, towards expressing the need for a sturdier, more structured way of helping to nurture and develop new generations of groupworkers .

The use of narratives in this paper was intended to begin to understand the experiences of groupwork students and educators. Pepper & Wildy (2009, p. 24) state that narratives, 'permit rich insights into the experiences of participants and are aligned with qualitatively oriented educational research.' In their review of the use of narratives in social work research Riessman and Quinney (2005) found that many disciplines have embraced narrative research over the past 30 years. It appears that social work uses narrative in practice and teaching but has yet to fully integrate it into research (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Talking about our experiences and asking others to do the same is an important aspect of being a group social worker. Larsson and Sjoblom (2009) discuss narrative methods in social work research and highlight that the basis for narrative research, human interaction, is the core of social work. Therefore, undertaking this project of illustrating mentoring among social group workers through the use of narratives seemed an appropriate and important method to utilize.

Story 1

What is clear to me through my education and life experiences is that we live our lives in groups, in our families, at work and at play. When I began my masters in social work I, like most, was not aware that one could 'specialize' in group social work. Quickly my coursework seeped in and I began to integrate this new information with my past experiences as a member of many groups (a family, a team, a class and friendship groups). I have always felt more comfortable more alive in groups. In college I played point guard on the women's basketball team. For those of you who do not know this is typically the shortest person on the court who dribbles the ball up and passes the ball to everyone. I ran the plays and my main goal was to help everyone else score baskets. I remember when it occurred to me in my Introduction to Group Work course that as a point guard I was a group facilitator. Trying to make sure everyone was contributing,

pulling out the silent member, engaging the deviant member, and planning and processing each game or practice was my way of facilitating that group.

As well, in my post undergraduate career as a team leader in a locked intensive residential treatment program for adolescent girls with major mental illnesses, I began to reminisce about what it was I was actually accomplishing. The freedom to imagine and then create a new group for the girls each Thursday night was thrilling to me. Music Appreciation Group, Family Feud Group, Name that Tune Group, Jeopardy Group, or Acting Group were just some of the ideas I was able to realize. At the time these groups felt more like ways of containing the girls' high level of affect while having some fun but I starting to realize that during much of the time in those groups there was group work happening. I look back and think about how I managed roles, composition, stages and conflict. Those skills were raw and without theory but the ability to look back at my past supported a deeper integration of this new knowledge.

At the same time as my course work began to grow more in-depth I met my mentors; two women who would shape me through their love and knowledge of group work. Without these two mentors my path as a group worker would not be so deep or enlightened. The first day I met my second year field supervisor I knew I would learn much from her. She sees the world in groups as I was beginning to and her energy and excitement about group work was contagious. She was the first person I had ever met that called herself a 'group worker.' Her trust in me and the way she helped me integrate knowledge into practice was invaluable. In the co-facilitation model of the agency I was able to observe her work and then try on new phrases and interventions, all with her optimistic view of the work. I began to see how my personality and my skills were a match with those of a group facilitator. Being in a room with a group of young girls co-facilitating an expressive therapy group felt comfortable and exciting and I knew being a group worker was where I belonged.

My other mentor in group work is a professor who also calls herself a 'group worker.' She talks about group work as its own field, emphasizing that it has its own place in education and in our client's lives. She taught me a new language, a group work language. With her belief in me she tossed aside any doubts I might have had about

my ability to become a group worker. She not only believed in my ability to learn and develop new skills, she pushed me up into places I had never been. I could not only be an effective group worker but I could add to the ever growing field; to the group work community. I could facilitate groups and facilitate growth and empowerment among new social workers. Beginning my professional career I have been shaped and pushed up by my mentors. The important aspects of these mentoring relationships were not only that these women were excellent clinicians and teachers; it's that they believe in the power of group work. They offer me positive guidance with much room to make my own mistakes and discoveries. If this field is to grow and continue to launch more group workers, the mentoring process must carry on.

(S. 2008 BUSSW Group Work Specialist graduate)

As outlined in this new worker's story, mentors are an important part of social workers' education and growth. Individuals trained specifically in groupwork and passionate about the field are needed to role model and teach new students. This student's story illustrates how mentoring relationships empower an individual to take on the role of groupworker. Programs offering specialized groupwork education are a must in order to allow students the opportunities to learn the art, science (Steinberg, 2006, p.33) and language of groupwork while trying on facilitation and leadership roles. These programs help students integrate past and current experiences within the context of groupwork theory and practice. These unique but few programs, help students experience being a group member, allow for mutual aid between students as they learn from and teach each other, and provide supportive environments for 'getting it right or misstepping,' i.e. making the mistakes that we hope to be able to go back and correct.

Equally as important, groupwork programs teach about self-care and empowerment for workers and group members and elaborate on the dynamics of parallel process. Groupwork, as remarked on by the following student's comments, is the link between micro and macro practice.

Story 2

From transitioning from a macro concentration to a clinical concentration during my first year at BUSSW, I truly believe that group work is most conducive towards addressing both of these arenas. Both macro and clinical fields share a sense of empowering its members/clients to address their personal concerns in a safe environment as well as to provide them the tools to proactively create solutions for their communities. It has been group work that has allowed me the space to address both of my interests in macro and clinical work as well as has allowed me the space to learn and observe from group work in action.

My undergraduate and high school backgrounds both provided me the opportunity to lead peer-run groups and activities. It had been in these settings where I was first introduced to the role of 'group leader' as well as 'group member' and the dual-nature that running a group and being a member of a group requires.

My first year social work placement provided me with the clearest example of the positive power and strength of group work. My agency had been located within a middle school and the groups I lead ranged from same sex educational to co-ed groups of youth ages 11-14. In all the groups, I had the opportunity to facilitate the young members in discussions on their personal lives as well as their concerns towards their local communities. Within two of the groups, the youth even felt empowered to partake in community service activities within the neighboring community. Witnessing the youth in action and their willingness to take ownership of their project and discussions truly opened my eyes to the importance of empowerment, ownership and cooperation that supporting adult allies can help to provide to youth and young adults.

I truly believe that group work holds great importance that may and/or may not be so obvious in a one-on-one clinical session. Especially with youth that may not be so apt to openly address their personal concerns and thoughts, seeing them in action and engaging with their peers is a truly valuable resource and opportunity to learn and support the growth and prosperity of youth in all of our communities. (KB. 1st year BUSSW student).

It is important to clarify the use of language in this student's story.

The first year student uses the terms 'clinical' and 'macro' to describe differences in working with a client base of individuals, families or small groups with that of engaging with a community or organization in a more macro (larger) sense. Groupwork methods acknowledge and embrace the true ecological perspective of social work values. Practising groupwork has allowed this student to witness group member empowerment while she simultaneously experiences it herself in finding her place in social work practice. Pernell (1986) writes of the critical link between social groupwork and empowerment and her belief that 'groups are a natural context for efforts toward empowerment' (p.114). As this student expresses in her story, this felt sense of empowerment as well as the connecting of clinical work with the larger system work made groupwork practice the right fit for her. East, Manning and Parsons (2002) speak to the significance of 'the creation of a learning environment that promotes empowerment' (p.49). In order to construct such an environment, seasoned teachers and supervisors who self-identify as groupworkers provide leadership, support, and encouragement to novice groupworkers .

From the stories of social work students, we have learned that the ability to claim the identity of a groupworker was keenly connected to the student's experience of active mentors in their academic environment, as well as being part of a collective group of students learning together. 'An empowerment model, by its very nature, conveys a sense of hope. It includes a focus on the self-esteem and self-confidence of the individual, on skill building and the development of critical thinking, and on the integration of the individual with a collective' (East, Manning, & Parsons, 2002, p.50). The following two narratives articulate this empowerment model well.

Story 3

I was not fortunate to benefit from professional mentors or supervisors who identified as group workers in my social work internships. This made the classroom learning, the structured group supervision in class where students presented and reflected on the academic literature and their group issues absolutely invaluable. Having the group work specialization empowers me to identify as a group worker.

(D. 2008 BUSSW Group Work Specialist graduate).

Similarly a foundation year social work student experiences increased confidence as she participates in the groupwork specialization.

Story 4

I find that courses identified under the subject title of 'group work' truly help me develop not only as a group worker, but a social worker overall. The techniques and strategies that are presented in the class help me feel more confident in both the individual and group settings. This increased awareness allows me to better serve any given population and overall improve the quality of the experience, for both myself and the client.

I certainly experienced growing into a group worker. Originally, I felt like I had no control and that I was just 'along for the ride' during group sessions. I could not tell you what would be talked about nor anticipate how the members would interact and respond to other group members and leaders. Now that I have been exposed and taught valuable techniques, I am better equipped to constructively guide the group when necessary. At the same time, I am now better able to empower group members and recognize stages where empowerment, redirection, or another learned approach is the most appropriate. Ultimately, I feel more knowledgeable about the group process, stages, and roles, and this directly allows me to better lead a successful group and positively impact the members within it.

When I first entered social work school, I did not realize that there was a specialization in group work, and more importantly, I did not realize my interest in this particular subset within the field. Due to my exposure to group work in the second semester, I was able to identify my future career goals and how a specialization in group work would complement these aspirations. It was with the group work specialization students that I found the first community that I connected with at social work school. Additionally, I was able to find a mentor that I could go to with questions, concerns, and receive quality guidance. This has been a key aspect in my graduate education experience.

(J. 2nd year social work student).

Learning groupwork skills and theory at the advanced level and as

part of a cohort allows for the experience of being a group member while simultaneously analyzing the dynamics of the group. The previous narrative describes the essence of Kurland & Salmon's (1998) belief that 'the classroom should be a place where students can struggle with ideas together...in a spirit of collegial cooperation' (p. 1). Sullivan & Mesbur (2002) too urge social groupwork educators to strive to reach this goal. It becomes our ongoing challenge to encourage and allow for this to routinely occur in the classroom setting.

Story 5

I was always interested in groups and how they work. On a personal level I had both positive and negative experiences, in camps, at school and with peers. One of my most memorable experiences was working as a group guide introducing new people to historical and important sites abroad. I loved giving powerful information to people and teaching them something they would never have known. I also had a mentor in my life that talked about groups but in an abstract way. He talked about group work as conducting an orchestra, helping everyone to achieve their best while creating a cohesive symphony. So when I came into graduate school to become a group worker I already had the love of groups but needed the theory. I needed to know, 'what exactly are we doing here?' The most powerful part of my social group work experience was our Advanced Group Work course. The group supervision and problem analysis was invaluable. Learning and growing with this group of graduate students who were supportive, while at the same time being critical thinkers, really made me understand and integrate group work into my life and career. I would recommend this kind of cohort learning to every student wanting to really 'get' group work.'
(D. BUSSW graduate)

Students describe that it is through exposure to groupwork learning and practice that they have been able to recognize a passion for the work. It is important to note that there is no control group in this project. We do not know the narratives of students who did not share in the similar experience of participating in a required group work course, or where

there may not exist a specialization in groupwork, or where faculty did not identify as groupworkers and teach specifically groupwork content. We suggest that a lack of exposure to the theoretical material, to the classroom cohort learning and to the availability and accessibility of teachers as mentors in the field would decrease the number of skilled, passionate groupworkers being sent out into the field. While today we see the ever increasing use of groups in field placement agencies, the responsibility for ensuring competent groupwork students resides with the social work education curriculum put forth by the schools. The stories assembled in this project are a call to social work programs to recognize the relationship between mentoring, exposure and students expressing an excitement for learning in specific areas.

Story 6

I was anxious and not excited to say the least to run groups when I began the program. I didn't have much experience in social work. I had an innate passion for counseling and mental illness, so I figured one on one would be my niche and I would grin and bear it for the groups. I figured it wouldn't be so bad since I would be co-leading with the other intern. But to my surprise I ended up really enjoying the group dynamic, especially when I was taking the group class simultaneously. So it's pretty ironic to me, because now I genuinely love groups. I won't lie I still get a little nervous being a facilitator, but I think that's normal in the beginning and if I wasn't nervous then that would probably mean I didn't care as much (at least that's what I keep telling myself!). I think what I witnessed most in the groups I had the chance to co-lead, which were all for children, was that the commonality shared amongst the members was the most soothing aspect of the group work. It didn't matter what they had in common, because they all endured it together ~ just as we (group work students) experienced our group work learning together in class. (KH. 1st year social work student).

Cohen (2002) states

I was quickly drawn to and taken under the nurturing wing of the faculty's group work contingent. . . They taught me about the importance of group work, of the synergistic properties of groups, and the centrality of mutual

aid. They also began to teach me about the culture of group work and its special legacy within the field of social work. (p.18)

She writes that ‘this propelled [her] toward a group work identity’ (p.19).

My own personal experience mirrors that of Marcia Cohen’s detailed above. I have learned that the supervisory and mentoring relationship needs to be one of openness with a willingness to both teach and learn. In the spirit of mutual sharing, I offer a piece of my own story:

Story 7

The work with students and supervisees in academia and in the field is what urges me on...inspires me...excites me. I look forward to students learning and sharing with each other, connecting the theory to practice and bringing examples alive in the classroom. Mentors have been significant in my life as a group worker and as a social worker and today continue to be a source of inspiration to me. The influence of mentors during my social work education, and later in my early years of supervising and teaching, had considerable impact on my strong desire and commitment to share this experience with students. Being nurtured and encouraged by Boston University School of Social Work group work faculty, Trudy Duffy & Lois Levinsky, to teach students in the field and in the classroom what I had been fortunate to learn from them as teachers was empowering. To join the Massachusetts chapter of the Association of the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG) and to attend and participate in the annual symposiums was awe inspiring. I will always remember what it felt like the day I first met Alex Gitterman, Andy Malekoff and Maeda Galinsky at an AASWG Board meeting – true mentors in every sense of the word to so many group workers. It was an honor. I knew in those moments that I wanted to be able to ensure that new group workers could have similar experiences as I did with mentors through the years. It is these relationships and meetings, along with my practice and teaching, which has increased my passion for working to enhance and sustain group work education in the field of social work.

(D.M.)

Over and over again, we witness the telling of these stories by teachers and students alike. The power of these narratives speak to the unique

experiences in the social groupwork field, the relational and mutual impact of the mentors on both teachers and students and the parallel processes that occur in the classroom, field and groups.

Further implications for social groupwork education

The personal narratives in this paper illuminate the need for groupwork mentors in social work education. Further research, in particular empirical research demonstrating the measurable impact of mentor relationships, is needed for the field. Showing evidence that mentor support will increase skill development as well as increase students' capacity for empathy would add greatly to the groupwork literature. In addition, mirroring the student's experience, further research on the mentor's experience and benefits from this role of mentor should be explored. Identifying as a groupworker mentor aids in the professional's ongoing reflection on their own practice, continually refreshes the mentor's commitment and passion to the advancement of the field and enhances his/her personal satisfaction with the work. To formalize this important relationship, schools of social work must integrate mentoring as part of the overall curriculum.

Beyond the personal and professional experience of students and mentors is the great need for the groupwork field to look specifically at the impact of mentoring and groupwork training on differing cultural, ethnic and other self-identified groups of students. Diversity in groupwork needs further research as does the field of training culturally competent groupworkers. How does cultural difference and specific cultural traditions respond to the cohort model of learning about groupwork? Does the role of mentor have a range of meanings traditionally and historically for different cultural groups? These questions, and many more, must be explored in order to further social work's understanding of what is needed to support and encourage new workers to enter into the groupwork field.

Conclusion

From the students' own voices, this shared groupwork experience is a parallel process to what they witness while facilitating groups in the field. Each experience builds upon the other to further growth over time, enhancing understanding of specific dynamics that perhaps the student only just grasped in a classroom experience the day before.

The student and the school must identify the process needed to assess the strengths of the student to help discover the best practice match for them. Upon reflection of the experiences of learning, training and teaching in groupwork it seems clear that the mutuality of the mentor/teacher and learner/student relationship is key to advancing the field of social work with groups.

Students and mentors are mutually inspired toward *growing the next generation of social groupworkers!* These first person accounts convey the dynamic process that lead students into groupwork practice. Relationships with mentors who identify as groupworkers, as well as the experience of group cohort learning, supports and empowers future groupworkers.

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