

Editorial

It is a great pleasure to write my first editorial of *Groupwork* as Co-Editor. Since taking up the role I have been very grateful to the kindness, tolerance and most importantly patience of Tim Kelly and David Whiting as I have learnt about the role of editor and understood all that needs to be done to take an article through from submission to be ready for publication. I have been welcomed by all on the Editorial Board. I have chaired my first Editorial Board meeting, which was attended by other new members of the Board, as well as seasoned members who have been committed to the Journal for many years. At this meeting there were nine people in the room and four joining us on Skype – from South Africa, America and Canada. For one member the meeting started at 3am in the morning and they stayed for the full 4 hours. Such commitment by everyone to the journal and groupwork is inspiring. All board members are so knowledgeable about groupwork, group dynamics and how to be good group members - it was a joy to chair the meeting.

It is not only the Board that is international, but so is our readership. Whilst British-based the journal has sustained international interest over many years. *Groupwork* has subscribers in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Republic of South Africa, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, The Netherlands, Turkey, and the USA, hence *Groupwork* has a significant contribution to make to international discussions about groupwork.

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The articles in this edition of *Groupwork* reflect this internationalism, as they are authored by groupworkers from Canada, South Africa,

America, and a team from America, England, Ireland, Barbados and Malaysia. Whilst experiences arise out of specific contexts – they also have universal applicability and relevance - this is most definitely true of the five articles in this edition which provide varied and stimulating content.

In my experience groupwork is not an end itself, a passion for groupwork alone is not adequate, there needs also to be a wider purpose to it. Working with groups is driven by values, purpose and agreed outcomes; the focus of *Groupwork* is social groupwork so it is not surprising that the theme of change is echoed in many of the articles published (Kelly, 2011). This is a common feature of the five papers in this edition. However the context of change in each of them is different. They speak of change in human rights in a hospital (Sulman, et al); in social work students understandings of diversity (Prinsloo); developing the groupwork skills of social work students (McLaughlin et al); in development of the knowledge and skills of university students and also challenging the power dynamics between young people and adults in school (Arches); and the final article by Cohen et al describes a project which aimed to expand groupwork practice internationally with an increased knowledge base.

The articles are written by people with different perspectives and experience, this is reflected in the language they use, influenced by the different roles people have taken, the relationships between them and the disciplines and countries they come from. They show both common ground and also differences, enabling us to learn and develop our thinking about groupwork from this range of experience and reflection.

Groupwork in research is not a new theme for the journal, (see for example Casstevens & Cohen, 2011) and it is the focus of Joanne Sulman, Marylin Kanee, Camala Day, Paulette Stewart, and Diane Savage's article. They write of using focus groups in research to understand staff's understandings and perceptions of human rights in a hospital in Canada. They describe how they used activities within a social groupwork value base and found that this helped to create an environment of acceptance and trust that enabled participants in the groups to contribute authentic and rich qualitative data that can be used by the hospital to improve the experience of those that work within it.

Reineth Prinsloo writes about a similar theme, but within a different setting. The focus of his article is the process of using groupwork on

a social work course in a South African University for students to learn about diversity and develop a greater understanding of cultural issues they could come across in their work. He describes how the groupwork encourages the development of the awareness and mutual understanding of fellow students' cultural practices and enables some to put aside the prejudices and misunderstandings they may have held.

The focus of the next two articles is about the development of groupwork skills for students. Donna M. McLaughlin and Será Godfrey Grantz explore a project that supports the development of groupwork skills with social work students. They share the results of a research project into how mentoring supported a new generation of groupworkers. They found that people learnt by being group members and then having the opportunity to theorise about their experience. Drawing on the words of the students themselves, they suggest the development of groupwork skills is helped by the mentoring relationship, but that also the mentors' own commitment to groupwork is enhanced by the relationship. This mutuality is key to the success of enhancing the understanding of groupwork for both parties.

Joan Arches writes of her experiences both in teaching groupwork as part of a university service learning class, and then how the students use their newly learnt skills in facilitating groups with middle school students. The approach she takes and teaches is self-directed groupwork or social action (Mullender and Ward 1991), which builds action in as an essential aspect of the groupwork process. She points to the importance of groupwork theory to inform and underpin the development of practice skills in the students; she describes how the self-directed approach starts from the context of the young people's lives and also facilitates the learning of new skills and sets out how the group can be central to social transformation. She concludes by reflecting that the groupwork approach enabled change in the skills and understandings of both groups of students as well in power dynamics and social change with the school and university.

The final article is slightly different, but clearly related to the others. Carol Cohen, Mark Doel, Mary Wilson, Deidre Quirke, Karen Ring and Sharima Ruwaida Abbas describe how an international team undertook an action research project to explore cross-national and cross-cultural aspects of social groupwork. The team (a group itself) utilised groupwork

to study and explore groupwork with others. They describe how they gained rich and sometimes unexpected findings through using a range of groupwork activities in 'small deliberation groups' at a variety of gatherings of groupworkers. They identify two cross-cutting themes of *Being together* and *Doing together* – this second linking with the theme of change - which are at the centre of all groupwork. However, how these manifest themselves varies with locale and culture; they also found that groupwork knowledge and skills are developed to meet the context in which people are working. Finally they highlight that cross-national writing is very unusual – their article being an exception to this - and something we would welcome more of in *Groupwork* in the future.

Jennie Fleming
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References

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