

The role of groupwork in social action projects with youth

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Abstract: *This article presents a case study, and puts forth an approach to social justice work with young people, that impacts youth development, empathy, and social change by applying two social work models, Self-directed groupwork, and its model for stages of group development, along with concepts of expressive and instrumental social roles in groups.*

The personal growth for the youth was demonstrated by their increased confidence, greater academic interest, and more positive perceptions by teachers. Socially they exhibited heightened understanding of others, communication skills, and teamwork. The result for the community was seen in the social change skills they acquired and the project they implemented.

Keywords: *groupwork; social action; self-directed groupwork; social roles; youth development*

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Introduction

The social action project with urban middle schoolers and university service-learning students discussed here resulted in the youth taking on the issue of *adultism* in their school. *Adultism* is the abuse of power by adults. In the course of the project the youth identified the issue, analyzed its causes, designed a survey to see if others had the same experience, analyzed the data, and came up with a pledge to stop *adultism* which the teachers will be asked to sign. By the end of their semester, the youth had presented their work at several venues and were already seeing results.

Practitioners and academics are recognizing the impact of social activism on positive youth development and community transformation. Increasingly we are seeing examples of youth involved in social change using participatory action research, social action, and other participatory methodologies (Barbera, 2008; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Individual growth and civic engagement together are coming to the forefront of youth development work.

This article reviews the literature on approaches to youth activism and social justice that incorporate the aforementioned concepts. Based upon the review of methods and projects taking place with groups of youth, only self-directed groupwork (Mullender & Ward, 1991) addresses group development as a significant factor needing attention in the engagement process. Recognizing the importance of groupwork theory and practice skills in working with youth on social change projects adds value to the growing field of activism and engagement with young people. With this as a focus, I present a social groupwork approach toward working with youth that employs self-directed groupwork and another model for stages of group development (Garland, Jones & Kolodny, 1973), along with the concepts of expressive and instrumental social roles. The results yield personal growth for the youth demonstrated by their increased confidence, greater academic interest, and more positive perceptions by teachers. Socially they exhibit enhanced empathy, communication skills, and teamwork. The impact for the community is seen in the social change skills they acquire and the projects they implement.

In the following case example, the stages of group development and

Self-directed Groupwork, along with British social action, were applied in a partnership involving university service-learning students and urban middle schoolers, who identified their issue as *adultism*, abuse of power by adults, and then developed and implemented a plan to address it in their school. This case study will demonstrate the importance of applying knowledge of group dynamics and stages in social justice work with youth, to provide the tools to facilitate change on individual, interpersonal, and organizational/societal levels.

Literature review: Social justice approaches to youth activism

Youth activism refers to programs and projects that encourage youth voice, agency, critical thinking, and reflection in youth led activities for social transformation. These approaches are all carried out collectively by youth, in groups, usually with adults as partners, facilitators, or co-facilitators. Social justice and groupwork are embedded in the pedagogy, process, and products. An understanding of power reflects an empowerment perspective that is woven into all aspects of the groups (Arches & Aponte Pares, 2005; Barbera, 2008; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Kilroy, Dean, Reipe, & Ross, 2007; London, 2007; Pearrow, 2008; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009; Watts & Guessous, 2006).

An example of an activist approach applied with youth, participatory action research (PAR), directly involves young people affected by a problem in the design and action to rectify the youth-identified issue. They participate in every stage as co-researchers and problem-solvers. PAR validates the knowledge of local people, in this case youth, and values their role as co-creators of knowledge (London, 2007). PAR is frequently carried out with university researchers who share their claim to expertise and authority with local young people, who would ordinarily be the subjects of their research agenda. The boundaries between subject and researcher are blurred. The young people experiencing an issue are recognized as possessing a unique and legitimate understanding of the problem and how it should be addressed (Kilroy, Dean, Reipe, & Ross, 2007). The process includes identifying an issue, designing research and collecting data to substantiate it, conducting a structural analysis to get at root causes, and carrying out action to change the conditions.

This is a powerful pedagogy for young people who are too often blamed for their troubles and left out of the problem solving process. It allows them to locate their issues in the public, rather than private domain, and motivates changes in power dynamics based on collective action (Arches & Aponte, 2005; Barbera, 2008; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

Similar to participatory action research, social justice youth development includes understanding the impact of social, economic, and political factors that impact the lives of young people, manifesting themselves as personal problems (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). It highlights the role oppression plays in maintaining the structural components of inequality that underlie issues youth face. (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Social justice youth development is also carried out in groups with a process defined by critical thinking, consciousness-raising, and social action.

Incorporating the concepts discussed in participatory action research and social justice youth development, British social action is values-based and carried out with groups, challenging unequal power relations, while creating opportunities for improving conditions in the environment, and changing systems. Social action is a philosophy and theory for social change based on the work of Paolo Freire, (1970), the tenets of popular education, and influenced in the United Kingdom by the disability movement, black activists, and the women's movement (Castelloe & Watson, 1999; Dominelli & McCleod, 1989; Evans, 1994; Oliver, 1992). Like participatory action research, and social justice youth development, it is carried out with groups who are experiencing an issue and generating the solutions (Breton, 1995; Fleming & Ward, 1999). This approach is guided by the belief that acting collectively through groups is powerful, and that people, of any age and status, can improve their lives by taking action on their own behalf to achieve their collectively identified goals. In social action groups members identify issues, analyze why they exist, design and carry out action, and reflect (Berdan et al, 2006; Matthies, Jarvela, & Ward, 2000; www.dmu.ac.uk/dmucs).

Self-directed groupwork

Attuned to the importance of the group as the basic unit of social action, only self-directed groupwork identifies group theory and process in the youth activism literature. Created to address the need in social work practice for a groupwork method that was empowering, self directed-groupwork puts forth a non-oppressive practice model in which workers and participants share power. It provides an avenue to work for social transformation in the larger social structure by challenging traditional power relations within the group and the broader environment. It incorporates an explicit values base committed to social justice and anti oppressive practice in which group participants: *define their own problems, set their own goals and act on their own behalf* (Mullender and Ward, 1991, p.2). Mullender and Ward identify five stages in this model.

In the *Pre-planning Stage* (Stage A), the team is assembled and clarifies its values before meeting with youth. With the values in place for the facilitators, the youth join and the *group takes off* (Stage B) as it establishes guidelines and starts the process of defining its issue. Participants select and analyze the problem, and determine an action plan (Stage C). The facilitators guide the process of deciding which issue the group will address, posing questions, and encouraging creative ways of looking at problems, analyzing root causes, and creating an action plan. As they answer the questions related to why this issue exists, the group takes on a consciousness-raising function. Participants are able to see connections between what they thought were their own personal problems/troubles and the social structures that give rise to these issues and experiences. It is through this process that a change in the social relationships occurs referred to as the *politics of interpersonal relationships*. Empathy deepens as the ways of relating to other oppressed groups become more collaborative and mutual. As the power dynamics change communication, especially listening, is enhanced.

With the issue identified, and the problem analyzed as a public issue, as opposed to a private trouble (Mills, 1970), the *group takes action* (Stage D). Reflections are ongoing. The cycle is complete when the *group takes charge* (Stage E). The power dynamics completely change and the group takes ownership. These stages are not purely linear and with each obstacle it faces, the group could find itself back at an earlier stage.

Minding the gap: Group stages, dynamics and roles

Self-directed groupwork responds to the need for an empowerment process in groups to define their issues, set their goals and determine their course of action. In addition, there is a need to understand the *stages of group development and how expressive and instrumental group roles* contribute to effective groups (Vinik & Levin, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1997; van Linden & Fertman, 1998; Cohen & Mullender, 1999). Yet, the significance of groupwork techniques and skills that contribute to successful outcomes with youth activism are not adequately addressed (Galvin, Guttierrez, & Galinsky, 2004; Getzel, 2006; Pearrow, 2008).

The field of social work highlights the connections between social groupwork and social activism (Berman-Rossi, 2002; Cohen & Mullender, 1999; Garvin, Guittierrez, & Galinsky, 2004; Vinik & Levin, 1991). In assessing effective groups in community-based research, Shultz, Israel & Lantz (2004) refer to the characteristics of groups that engage the skills of all members. Finn, Jacobson, and Campana (2004) identify the importance of the group as central to social transformation in their work with participatory research, popular education and popular theatre. Cohen & Mullender (1999) caution that group practice should not be constrained by approaches that focus on only one system level such as micro, meso or macro, but rather group processes can be applied to foster goals on all three levels. Mondros and Berman-Rossi (1991) two decades ago, spoke of the role that social groupwork practice models play in community organizing. They made the connections between successful groups, knowledge of group development stages and effective organizing campaigns. But despite this, currently most of the literature on groups, and the youth civic engagement and activism literature, remain separate.

Incorporating an understanding of group roles, the stages of group development, and Self-directed groupwork into social change projects with youth enhances the likelihood that outcomes will be successful. (Fig. 1). By focusing on the immediate context in which the youth operate, the facilitators can support individual needs for growth along with group process and action. Starting with an understanding of what to expect as groups develop, the facilitators can be mindful of the types of social interactions and individual concerns with which members may approach the group. Garland, Jones and Kolodny (1973) identified five stages of group development which can aid in the successful planning

Fig. 1

<i>Self Directed Groupwork</i> (Mullender and Ward, 1991)	<i>Stages of Group development</i> (Garland, Jones, Kolodny, 1973)
<p>Stage A: Workers Take Stock</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preplanning/Agreeing on empowering principles for the work before meeting with users. • Assembling a co-worker team and establishing a mechanism for external feedback through consultation and reflection 	<p>Stage 1: Pre-Affiliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential group members approach the group with ambivalence • Workers are mindful of the tentativeness of members' participation • Initial meetings are engaging, fun, and not overly demanding • The group explores their values, goals and process
<p>Stage B: The Group Takes Off</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers engage with users as partners to build a group with 'open planning' lines. • Users set norms, define, and analyze the problems, and set group. 	<p>Stage 2: Power and Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members commit to the group but are still wary about their roles and participation • Testing behavior and power plays are characteristic • Workers plan agendas in which members have power and control • Planning takes place as the group establishes the guidelines, values, and mission
<p>Stage C: The Group Prepares to Take Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group explores the questions: • WHAT is the issue? • WHY does it exist? • HOW can we change the conditions that are causing it? 	<p>Stage 3: Intimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group functions as a family and work is carried out as a unit • Participants feel aligned with the group • Roles are evolving
<p>Stage D: The Group Takes Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants move from recognition to action • Learning takes place, and plans may change, as reflections accompany action 	<p>Stage 4: Differentiation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A division of labor emerges • Members take on unique roles based on their interests, talents, and skills • The group is engaged in its work.
<p>Stage E: The Group Takes Charge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users are running the group • They make connections between WHAT, WHY and HOW and focus on broader issues and next campaigns • Workers retreat and may leave the group altogether. • Participants are learning to take control of their lives and how they are perceived by others 	<p>Stage 5: Termination/separation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are given ample notice of when the group will end • The group reviews achievements, reflects on the learning, and discusses next steps • Celebratory events punctuate the formal end of the group

and implementation of empowerment and social transformation groups with youth.

As a group begins to form, (*Forming or Pre-affiliation* stage), potential members approach it with ambivalence. There is a lack of trust as members try to figure out whether they want to join the group. They need time to develop trust, decide what they think about the group, and make a commitment. Facilitators select activities and icebreakers that are fun, and geared towards getting to know each other, but with limited and non-threatening self-disclosure. Icebreakers may include asking: *How did you get your name? What is something I wouldn't know to look at you?*

In this first stage, which is similar to the initial stage of self-directed groupwork, facilitators guide the process of setting group goals, establishing group values, and developing group guidelines. To build on strengths and start to identify possible group roles, facilitators might do an exercise in individual asset mapping. They are encouraging group and ownership cohesion by asking: *What do you bring to the group and what might your role be?* Consistent with the stages of self-directed groupwork, these activities all help establish ownership, identify the values that will guide the work, promote communication, as well as, align with the positive side of the youth's ambivalence. The work, in this stage, is geared towards building relationships, and developing trust. Facilitators recognize that individuals need to feel comfortable and see a role for themselves before they can act as a group (van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

The next stage is characterized by *power and control issues*. Actions reflect the theme: *Whose group is this?* Facilitators avoid power struggles. They introduce icebreakers in which youth may be asked to identify their own strengths and assets, and the things about themselves they are proud of, as they start to share more and identify what they might contribute. The youth determine the group's goals and codes of conduct, and firmly establish that it is their group. To recognize their expertise the youth are asked to identify issues that are of concern to them. They might give the group a name to further promote ownership (Fleming 2004).

Moving to the third stage, the group achieves a level of *intimacy* that allows them to productively work together. In self-directed Groupwork, this is referred to as, *the group takes action*. Rules are applied, trust

continues to build, working relations are in place, and the group functions somewhat like a family. As roles and tasks are clarified the group enters the fourth stage, where *differentiation* takes place and members build on their own strengths and leadership skills. The group moves closer to its goals. Each member takes on a role that contributes in some way.

The last stage, is *separation/termination*. This stage can be particularly difficult for the university students, or facilitators, who might want to deny that the group and their relationship with the youth is ending. To provide closure and reinforce the accomplishments, facilitators review what was achieved and highlight strengths. End of group celebrations can support a positive termination. If successful, this last stage will correspond with the self-directed groupwork stage *the group takes charge*, and the youth will take ownership and continue.

Group roles and dynamics:

At each stage group cohesion propels the group forward, on task, with all members in some way participating. Members need to feel the group satisfies their needs (Toseland, Jones & Gellis, 2004). Social cohesion, a core ingredient in maintaining effective groups, is strengthened by paying attention to expressive and instrumental roles for each participant of the group (Toseland, Jones, & Gellis, 2004). Expressive roles meet the members' socio-emotional needs. They may connect to socialization, affiliation, or recognition, and include roles that allow for humor, caring, connectedness, integration, conflict resolution, empathy, participation, and ownership. They reflect the needs, as well, as the strengths of the members. Instrumental roles are those necessary to complete the tasks, and reach the group goals. They include focusing, keeping track of time, planning, summarizing, explaining, teaching, researching, and in some cases writing, editing, presenting and fundraising. Skilful facilitators identify strengths and reinforce the roles that are emerging. Members who perform positive group roles feel greater ownership of the group.

The case study and service-learning

In this example, the work took place in a public middle school located in a low income, high crime section of a large Northeastern city, with a sizable African American and immigrant population mostly from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cape Verde, and Somalia. Plagued by political, social, and economic obstacles, the school is remarkable for its positive spirit. Only eight years old, it is beautifully constructed and well maintained. Because it has a large enrolment, the school is divided into four identical academies, each led by its own staff and head master. Since it is located in between rival gang territories, the youth are required to wear uniforms to ensure their safety walking to and from school. Precautions are in place to make sure the youth do not wear colors identified with a specific gang. It is not unusual to hear gunshots while waiting for the bus at the end of the day, or for the school to go into lockdown after a shooting where the perpetrator is still at large. Yet the school is much better described by its welcoming atmosphere, community involvement, and commitment to positive youth and community development. Named after a local female activist who organized the community to effectively transform land that housed a dump into a much needed middle school, the school still reflects the commitment to the community. At any given time there are community groups meeting on school grounds and visitors are always welcome.

The youth who volunteered for the project ranged in age from 11-14 and were in grades six and seven. Those who volunteered were all participants in an afterschool enrichment program for students who had been identified as needing additional social, emotional and/or cognitive support. As participants in the program they were able to select one of five groups for their after school activity in addition to mandatory homework groups. Members of the University service-learning class recruited the youth first by handing out flyers and talking to the middle schoolers during their lunch hour, and then by presenting information on the group at an after school meeting where the youth made their final choice for afterschool program activities. The youth who took part reflected the diversity of the school's ethnic composition however the majority were males. Each semester only one female student was engaged. Consistent with the tenets of Self-directed Groupwork (Mullender & Ward, 1991) the membership was voluntary and open.

Participation varied from week to week, and across the semesters, but five core members were consistent in their attendance and participation. Because the group had open membership the group dynamics required attention to ensure group cohesion and continuity. Over the course of a year, we met once a week for an hour in the library of the school. Each week anywhere from four to ten youth participated, with the core group of five regulars.

Building on the theoretical foundations of social action and Self-directed Groupwork along with social groupwork concepts, five ethnically diverse university students, ages 19-55, enrolled in a service-learning class and facilitated the group. While they all attended each group session, along with the professor, each week one student was the primary facilitator, with others leading the ice breaker, group reflections, and assisting in the process. Understanding the issues regarding affiliation in the beginning stages of a group, the student facilitators established a tradition of beginning each meeting with an icebreaker that was short, encouraged movement as the youth had been in class all day, allowed for transitioning from class to group, and always made everyone laugh. They selected this taking into account ambivalence as new members approached a group. They wanted the group to be fun, engaging, and to appeal to the positive side of any ambivalence the youth might have had.

The university facilitators knew they needed to meet the expressive needs of the group for fun. One such activity is called, *pass the power*, everyone stood in a circle, one person began by passing a *Clap* to the person next to them who had to catch it as they passed it on to the person next to them, catching it and clapping at the same time as the person who passed it. The activity had variants such as speeding up, and changing directions, but it was fun and became part of the group culture.

The first few meetings were spent identifying instrumental and expressive roles and tasks, establishing values, goals, and working relationships expected in the *group takes off* stage, along with sharing interests, culture, and concerns about the community. The university students had already established their values in class activities before meeting with the youth in the *pre-planning stage*.

During the third session, in a discussion about community and school assets, the youth mentioned how hurt they were when during

the previous year someone who shadowed their principal for a day, as part of a city initiative, wrote what they felt was a disparaging article about their school and, by implication, about them – the middle school students. The university students located the article and brought it to the next meeting where we all read it out loud, giving each member a chance to participate, and the youth elaborated upon their concerns. They were pleased and surprised when the university students suggested that they might write a response to the letter and try to get it published. Now in the power and control stage the university students wanted to ensure that the youth knew they had the power to direct the action of the group. The youth needed to know that they were in control of the agenda. The letter that emerged built on their skills, accentuated their strengths, and brought out their unique contributions. This activity contributed to the group cohesion and as a consequence they felt empowered and expressed it. A copy of the letter was given to their principal, and sent to the newspaper which published it.

In the next few meetings the youth discussed problems in their community, made posters of the movie that would document it, and analyzed some of the issues. They focused on violence and impressed us all with their skill in analyzing the causes. They created webs uncovering root causes and connections between political, social and economic factors that contribute to violence. Indeed they were demonstrating higher order skills in critical thinking and analysis. They worked well as a group in the intimacy stage learning about each other and sharing the work. The group made decisions by a majority vote, following group discussions.

As the first semester ended they selected the topic of violence as their action project for the next semester, and started to think about what research they would carry out to help them decide on an action. But as the second semester began the youth were clearly stuck. They felt overwhelmed by the task, and the issue, and always diverted the discussion to issues about their day, their feelings about teachers who disrespected them, and the powerlessness they felt as students, even in a caring school. They had identified the *what* and the *why*, and were feeling comfortable with each other in the intimacy stage, but the group did not feel able to *take action*. It was at this point that the university students were reading about *adulthood*, the abuse of power by adults (Bell, 1995). They mentioned to the youth that their experiences with their

teachers might just be a manifestation of that public issue. The youth were elated as they embraced the concept and asked to read the article.

From there we moved to *the group takes action*, and were firmly enmeshed in the *differentiation stage* as well. It had become clear to the group members that this was not their individual problem, but an issue of abuse of power by adults. They applied the personal to the political as they clarified what they experienced by creating collages from magazine pictures. Individual talents and skills emerged as the youth embraced their roles in the group. Artistic and humorist roles came to the forefront in beautifully crafted and quite humorous collages that showed exactly how they experienced *adultism* in school. As they started to see how oppression is internalized and manifested in their daily lives, the way they related to each other changed. We observed examples of how empathy deepened as they became more collaborative.

For the next two months the group worked at a rapid pace designing a survey to enable them to find out if this was an issue for other students, as well as to get others on board in the action. They learned about creating surveys as they clarified the purpose, and designed criteria for questions to ensure they collected needed information. One youth who had been quiet in discussions until that point, emerged as a powerful force in thinking about and expressing the issues, once he sat down at the computer and started a draft of the survey. Sitting in the group he was quiet, but once he put his hands on the keyboard a leader appeared. All were quick to notice this and commented on it. From then on his strengths and skills were supported as he led the group forward. Another youth who was on the verge of failing, and who was regularly kicked out of class for being disruptive, showed himself to be a master editor helping the group to clarify the questions, avoid redundancy, and arrange the statements in a meaningful order in the survey. The afterschool program director who showed up at one meeting said his teachers would never believe that he had the skills and knowledge that he was exhibiting. A member who wanted to be a psychologist was supported when he showed his understanding of others. Each participant was encouraged to develop the roles that matched their personality and skills. These youth who, in the classroom, were not generally recognized as contributing anything but trouble, thrived as their contributions were recognized and supported.

Once the survey was completed the group continued to take action

as they approached the principal and presented the survey, along with the request that they be allowed to distribute it in every homeroom in the school. It was a tense few moments as they made their presentation about *adultism* to this no nonsense principal to whom none of them had ever spoken before this time. Their presentation was flawless, and the impressed principal not only agreed to let them disseminate the survey, but requested that they present their findings, along with recommendations, at a teacher development meeting.

Survey administration met some resistance from academy heads who had reasons not to allow it to be distributed on time. With the help of the afterschool program director, the youth did manage to distribute nearly a hundred surveys, which they analyzed, and presented in a PowerPoint at a city-wide afterschool program event attended by members of the City Council, the School Committee, and the Superintendent's Office. As part of their display they explained what they did, why they did it, and what they found to elected officials and others who had authority over the schools.

The youth, some of whom, had never been in this part of the city before, showed efficacy and confidence as they explained their work which included in the recommendations a pledge from teachers committing to address their own *adultism*. As we approached the semester's end we all felt that the *group had taken off*. This was not a negative experience for anyone involved because the university students consciously worked to integrate what they were learning about termination. The youth reflected on all the learning that had taken place, the knowledge they had created, and commented how it was so different from being in a class. The university students were moved and impressed by the accomplishments of the youth and the power of the social action and self-directed groupwork process. They embraced the concepts of group development and roles. Their reflections underscored how difficult it was initially to let go, allow the youth to take charge, and set the agenda. This experience had changed the way they viewed youth and youth work practice.

Discussion

Social action, and other activist approaches to social change, combined with mindful groupwork facilitation, can impact both individual and community development. Youth who are not necessarily strong in traditional classroom settings can shine when given the opportunity to participate in experiential learning projects such as those building on social action, PAR, and self-directed groupwork. For many this can provide a new way to approach learning. Experiential learning occurs when actions are reflected upon and the lessons learned can be applied to other situations. It makes the learner an active participant in his/her own learning (van Linden & Fertman, 1998). The experiential learning cycle reflects the similar components presented in self-directed groupwork referred to as the *Information-Action-Reflection cycle*.

In these settings youth can build much needed twenty-first century skills working in teams, honing critical thinking, building communication skills, learning to access information, and developing technological prowess. Encouraged by knowledgeable facilitators, they learn how to research, and become co-creators of knowledge as they develop social interactions and civic engagement competencies. This provides a strong alternative, or complement, to the classroom which does not always accommodate a range of learning styles.

Within the traditional classroom, teachers schooled in these methods and techniques can find they are having success with students they had previously thought were hard to engage. By acknowledging the techniques embedded in activist youth work and groupwork methods, teachers and other adults working with youth can find more opportunities and approaches that develop individual growth and civic engagement. Social interactions change. Viewing the class as a group, and applying knowledge of developmental stages, and roles may enhance its functioning. Youth who are turned off learning and alienated from the community can find a place to reengage. Young people who are active in civic engagement projects can learn about themselves and groups while making a difference in their communities. For all participants, knowledge of working with groups will enhance individual competence and later civic engagement work as well.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the significance of groupwork theory and practice skills in working with youth on social change projects adds a missing component in the growing body of literature on activism and engagement with youth. For over twenty years the Centre for Social Action has acknowledged the role groupwork plays in social justice work with youth. The model of self-directed groupwork, which accompanies social action, is unique in responding to the need for a model of group stages that applies to the social change process. Because young people spend so much time in groups it behoves those working with them to understand the dynamic nature of these contexts.

In addition to Self-directed groupwork, applying an understanding of social groupwork's developmental stages and group roles can add value to the impact and effectiveness of the group. When the university service-learning classroom is also seen as a group, these same theories can be applied to promote connected-learning. The social change process which depends on the group cannot help but improve. While the theories underlying this work were carried out in the community with youth, the university students were simultaneously learning about themselves, power, and social change.

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