

# Editorial

Conflict, difference of opinion, the dialectical process, storming, power and control. These are all the stock in trade concepts for groupworkers. Though not a mandatory process for all groups, we know that divergent opinions and conflict can be a normal part of group life. Differences are not to be feared, but can energise and give life to a group. We know that if the group engages with difference and constructively works at it, something new and useful can emerge from the struggle – especially if the difference of opinion emerges out of a shared concern or passion.

Politics is one area where difference of opinion can manifest quickly, and some would say that in polite society politics should not be a topic of conversation. And yet, when I first moved to Scotland in 2003 I was struck by the level of political discourse that permeated everyday conversation – even when I did accidentally stray into polite society. It did not seem to matter whether I was getting into a taxi, getting a haircut or standing outside the office speaking with the smokers. People discussed political matters, from the local to the international, in a way that I had not experienced while living in Atlanta or south Florida. Sure, people spoke about politics at times “back home”, but the variety of informed political opinion was not as palpable as what I experienced in Scotland. As I got used to this level of discourse it lost its novelty. However, over the year building up to the Scottish Referendum on Independence I was reminded of the energising effects of divergent opinion and the palpable difference in levels of political discourse between my country of origin and my adopted home country. If I thought Scottish people spoke a lot about politics in 2003, that was nothing compared to political discourse 10 years later.

There were, of course, political speeches, advertising campaigns, billboards, leafleting activities, and copious lengths of newsprint columns. But more than anything else, the referendum created a seemingly endless series of conversations carried out in small and large

groups of people. Groups of people in pubs, in offices, on lunch breaks, on street corners, in families, at parties were talking about their vision of the country they wished to live in. Social media was awash with groups of people speaking politics, and in many ways people turned away from mainstream media and engaged in social media instead of, or in addition to, traditional media outlets. The divergent opinions about the kind of country we all wanted to live in created a buzz that re-energised many, many disenfranchised citizens. And though the actual ballot was a simply yes or no question (Should Scotland be an independent nation?), the engagement with the divergent beliefs created something new – it is being called the referendum effect. Over 84% of eligible voters turned out for the vote and people are more engaged politically than ever. Political engagement and political party membership has soared to unprecedented levels. And though the outcome of the vote was to keep the status quo, something has changed. Scotland and her citizens and the rest of the UK may never be the same.

How often have we seen the same thing in our groups? By engaging in the debates, the differences, the divergent visions, we create something new, something more vibrant, and something wonderfully uncertain. Groupwork theory and practitioners have long understood the value of this dialectical process that occurs in groups and I suspect it is one of the reasons many of us love working with groups.

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In this issue of *Groupwork* we have four articles written by academics and practitioners as well as two student essays and the return of our book review section. The contents of this issue reflect a wide and divergent range of groupwork practice, theoretical bases, and experiences. For example, Pullen-Sansfacon, Roy and Ward explore groupwork practice across different North American contexts. Their analysis highlights the importance of context on the definition of practice itself. Though professions may exist across the globe, the way in which individual professions practise from jurisdiction to jurisdiction can vary enormously. Though this article focuses on the social work profession and social work with groups, the influence of context on professional practice will be familiar to other professions – whether from health, education, or social services. Exploring such differences

can help inform our own practice – wherever that may occur. In their article on social media use in self-help and mutual aid groups, Boyce, Seebohm, Chaudhary, Munn-Giddings and Avis describe how face to face groups are using social media. Not being a digital native, I remember a time when the use of technology in face to face groups would be seen as an anathema to good practice. But now, this fusion of divergent technologies creates something new and useful for members. Philip Carter's article brings together seemingly divergent fields of enquiry (neuroscience and psychodramatic groups). Carter wonders if groupwork could shift or update the neurologically embedded sense of self. While few articles in *Groupwork* are about group psychotherapy and fewer still are about neuroscience, this article again highlights the value in engaging in different world views and alternative perspectives. In the final article, Hessenauer and Simon view learning communities through a groupwork lens. As they state, learning community cohorts are groups, and bringing a groupwork lens to learning communities enhances and enriches learning communities.

In this issue the Editorial Board is proud to include two student essays. These essays were joint winners of the Student Groupwork Essay Prize awarded at the International Association of Social Work with Groups Conference held in Calgary, Canada in 2014. *Groupwork* values the work with groups that is undertaken in the diverse contexts in which student practitioners operate. We wish to showcase this work to promote the generation of knowledge and the application of groupwork. The essay by Huang is a group proposal for a mindfulness group for college students. The essay by Stone is a reflection on a group experience that was part of a social work course. Both essays will be familiar to groupwork educators as these types of assignments are common in different parts of the world. Both students make good use of groupwork theory to understand their experience. Though these essays are from different parts of the world (North America and Australia) they give this ageing academic a sense of hope for groupwork's future.

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