

Editorial

Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, in a scornful tone, ‘When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more or less’ in Lewis Carol’s *Alice through the Looking Glass*.

Groupwork has over the years published a number of papers about one specific form of social groupwork - Social Action. The other week I got a call inviting me to speak at an event about social action (no capitals), but it did not take me long to realise that I, and the person at the other end of the phone, were using the same words to mean different things. To me Social Action is a collective process for social change – for them it was about volunteering, containment and encouraging young people to join in activities that would reduce the impact of the cuts in public spending. We were using the words to mean what we chose. Same words, different meaning.

This led me to wondering about the word groupwork and what meanings it had within the journal. One of the strengths of *Groupwork* is the breadth and diversity of papers we publish – across disciplines, methodologies and continents. This issue alone has papers from authors based in US/Scotland, South Africa, Canada, England and Norway, and from such varied disciplines as social work education, occupational therapy and electrical engineering. We recognise that groupwork happens in many different places and in many different ways. But I wondered if there was an unintended consequence in that we were encouraging people to let groupwork mean ‘what they choose it to mean’? is it OK for groupwork to mean all things to all people, or do we need to start a conversation about some core elements of what groupwork is as a guiding framework? Alternatively, should we make our assumptions about what groupwork means more explicit in *Groupwork*?

Intentionally keeping them broad, to start the conversation, here are some questions I think we as groupworkers need to consider when writing or reviewing papers for inclusion in the journal. These would include:

- What do we mean by change in a groupwork context?

- What is the connection with social change and individual and personal change, what is the primary intent?
- How do we see group members, as in need of education or experienced people with knowledge and skills to draw on?
- What do we understand as the causes of the challenges that people face in social group work?
- How do we see the role of any professional in the group – leader, collaborator, expert, partner?
- How is a commitment to anti-oppressive practice demonstrated in the groupwork?
- How does the groupwork both respect and ensure the human rights and dignity of all involved?
- Is attendance at groups compulsory for members or voluntary?

I am sure others could add to this.

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Interestingly, the first paper in this issue is by Mark Macgowan who considers the standards of the International Association of Social Work in Groups (IASWG) which are intended to stimulate debate about foundation competencies for social work with groups. The standards include values, knowledge and skills. The study was to determine the reliability and validity of the inventory created from the standards for social work practitioners and students in Scotland. The study shows that the inventory is both important and valuable in the Scottish context.

It is unusual to have one paper in *Groupwork* with mathematical formulae in it – let alone two. Macgowan uses statistical analysis to illustrate the results of his study and Brijlall writes of using groupwork to teach Maths. Whilst the focus of the groupwork, which is to support students in learning mathematical processes, is not common in the pages of this journal, the outcomes for student learning will come as no surprise. The students benefitted from the groupwork process and developed critical learning skills, shared learning and knowledge, collaborative problem solving and the surfacing of collective knowledge. Brijlall argues that the students gained skills in both mathematical principles and also groupwork. This theme of the importance of groupwork in education will be developed in the next edition 25:1 which

is a special edition focusing on groupwork in education.

Sporild and Bonsaksen's paper describes an art therapy group for people with eating disorders. They demonstrate how the combination of therapeutic groupwork principles and the more activity based occupational therapy groupwork tradition combine powerfully to promote both discussion and activity with therapeutic benefits for the group members. The use of art enabled things to be addressed that might not arise without that activity.

The next two papers are shorter, more descriptive, accounts of groups coming together for a particular purpose and finding in so doing that many groupwork benefits arise. Bryce writes of a community arts exhibition organized by a group of people who use mental health services. Groups were crucial at all stages of this project – creating pieces of art, working groups organizing the event, interacting with the exhibits and creating group reflections. Johnson writes of a women's swimming group he came in contact with whilst swimming himself. As a groupwork educator he was intrigued by the group and its significance for the members, and relates his own observations and group members' reflections to aspects of groupwork theory.

The papers in this issue of *Groupwork* in some ways are very different, but they all attest to the power of groupwork to enable group members to gain strength in shared experiences, make sense of shared problems, and allow for interpersonal learning. I can agree with Johnson that groupwork is varied and complex – but always interesting.