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Group Workers at Work: Theory and Practice in the Eighties

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professional lives. Stone's scholarship is impressive, and although her writing style and vocabulary are strictly academic, the book is not pedantic. The time and effort spent reading and thinking about her analysis were enjoyable and worthwhile. I recommend the book to my colleagues.

Group Workers at Work: Theory and Practice in the Eighties, edited by Paul H. Glasser and Nazneen S. Mayadas. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986, 296 pp., $39.50.

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Few sociologists are trained in group work even though we are often exposed to small group theory and research in our graduate programs. However, a strong theoretical foundation is not adequate preparation for practice with groups. Hence, borrowing useful information from other fields can advance our own work.

Group Workers at Work is an interesting collection of symposium papers written by and for social workers. The Introduction and second section (Chapters 2–5) trace the evolution of group work from a broadly applicable technique for education and social change to narrow use as individual psychotherapy conducted in groups. The small group has been "rediscovered" as a technique in social planning and administration, community organization and development, and organizational development in large formal organizations. This reemergence of small group process in other than psychotherapeutic settings calls for the attention of clinical sociologists.

Ephross notes the ubiquity of task groups on the job and in communities: "Task groups occupy a great deal of time in the lives of a broad spectrum of people . . . what goes on in such groups makes a great deal of difference both to the inner lives of participants and to various institutions and processes in society at large." In these task groups planning occurs, decisions are made, and courses of action adopted. This fact of social life should command the attention of clinical sociologists or any social change agent. Group work is critical whether a small group is itself the target of change and program development or a base for achieving wider social change.

The historical course of group work in social work practice in Section 2 may seem of little value to clinical sociologists. But, the first three chapters are worthwhile because they sensitize us to the variety of contexts for small group interventions. Group work can be a means for change and for growth and development of individuals and of small groups such as families and work units, or for broader change in communities and society.

Overall, the first section of the book is too long and often redundant. The

first five chapters could be reduced to one longer, tighter chapter. And the chapters in Part III could have been given more space. These essays introduce useful topics for beginners, but not enough to proceed on; they are rather a guide to some things to learn more about. For those who have training and experience in group work, Chapters 6–10 provide valuable material.

Maier examines "play" and "playfulness" as part of group sessions. Group leaders should be aware that members may be least able to play when it is most needed. Maier provides a conceptual framework and examples for integrating playfulness into a working group rather than using isolated behavioral sequences out of context. "Play encourages people to stretch beyond their usual capacity, beyond their usual concepts of themselves." It gives group members an added ability to deal with events. Play in a group is an interactive process that stimulates members' involvement and cohesion. Play is also a resource for creativity or freeing a group that gets stuck—as in playing with ideas as a way of creative problem solving. Play can also teach members new modes of expression. In play, members are often relieved of constraints, may look at themselves or the situation in novel ways, explore actions and ideas with low cost for failure, yet learn to risk. Given that play itself is part of life and that playfulness is often forgotten, people with problems need to relearn to play.

Garland examines loneliness in the life cycle of a small group. Garland argues that the context of modern urban society alienates humans from each other as well as from themselves, though we try to escape from loneliness. The context heightens the anxiety as people feel manipulated by forces beyond their control yet somehow responsible for their own fate. But needs for loneliness exist and compete, throughout the life cycle, with needs for affiliation. Loneliness becomes problematic for individuals when the steps taken to relieve loneliness perpetuate outsider status. Group leaders must understand the developmental stages of small groups and the dominant themes and issues at each stage which contribute to the dialectic process of loneliness and affiliation. The group facilitator's own orientation to issues of loneliness and affiliation are also of major importance to the group process.

Gentry reviews consensus as a form of group decision making. Though majority rule techniques reach decisions more rapidly, consensus is more effective if members must be rallied to act on the decision. Research reviewed showed that groups could be trained in consensus decision making. Such groups produced better decisions, produced more creative ideas, handled conflict better, and got more information and ideas from members when compared to untrained groups that used majority-rule decision making. The article includes guidelines for instructing groups in the consensus process and case examples. This is a good article which directs the reader toward understanding and use of consensus and the value of it.

In Chapter 9, Garvin discusses assessing and changing group conditions—group

structure, group process, and the shared meanings—to aid the group in goal attainment. The first step in changing group conditions is assessing them. The article provides some simple assessment devices that can be used to measure each of the group conditions to be fed back to the group as resources for change.

In Chapter 10, Etcheverry, Siporin, and Toseland provide a useful discussion of role-playing as a technique used in groups. They review the ways role-playing can be used. They also draw attention to common mistakes in the use of role-playing and describe ten techniques that can be used.

Parts IV and V include papers on applications of group work for specific purposes. These chapters are the best part of the book. Hartford and McCoy discuss support groups for caretakers of older relatives. The paper takes us step by step through the various decisions and rationales of the group leaders—the authors—as they develop their approach. It covers the set of things group facilitators must consider and how the set was applied for this particular purpose. Schoenfelder and Cobb, in Chapter 12, do the same in describing a group intervention for children of divorce. In Chapter 13, Peirce describes group work with alcoholics as an alternative to the model of Alcoholics Anonymous. Peirce's comparison of the two approaches should be especially interesting to persons who work in alcoholic treatment settings. Sundel and Sundel describe assertiveness training groups, presenting their session-by-session program in some detail as well as data from their evaluation of their approach.

The chapters in Part V are on work with minority groups. Colca (Chapter 15) describes a small group intervention to facilitate school desegregation in Buffalo, New York. The paper gives a natural history of the experience, the group process, and problems and recommendations. Hirayama and Vaughn (Chapter 16) describe group work with alienated, chronically ill, elderly blacks that succeeded as an outreach program and provided strong help for participants in managing tasks of health care and daily functioning. Another good paper describes an intervention with Chicano youth in school (Brown and Arevelo, Chapter 18) which includes theoretical development, a model for doing the group, and a description of it. The group was seen to mediate tension and potential culture clash between the youth and the Anglo school system.

In the final section, Chapter 20 is a very good article on a method for training group workers using "video stimulus-modeling methodology," a method developed by the authors of the paper (Mayadas and Duehn) which combined modeling with video feedback and behavioral rehearsal. The article and technique should be studied and considered carefully by anyone training people to work with groups.

Overall, this book provides many useful ideas for clinical sociologists who work with small groups. The historical materials are somewhat long, but other chapters offer helpful material for work with small groups.