

CHAPTER 2

Historical Developments

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter describes historical developments in the practice of group work and in the social sciences. A historical perspective is presented to help workers develop a broad understanding of the uses of groups in practice settings and develop a knowledge base they can use to practice effectively with different types of groups. The historical overview of group work practice presented in this chapter suggests that throughout the twentieth century, groups were used for a variety of purposes, such as education, recreation, socialization, support, and therapy. The early emphasis on the use of groups for education, recreation, and socialization has waned in recent years in favor of an increased interest in the use of groups for support, mutual aid, and therapy. This trend parallels the gradual transition during the 1930s and 1940s away from group work's amorphous roots in adult education, recreation, and social work to its formal incorporation into the social work profession during the 1950s. Currently, social group work is being revitalized in schools of social work and in practice settings. As current trends indicate, in recent years there has also been an increased recognition of the roots of social group work and the multiple purposes group work can serve.

This chapter also briefly explores historical developments in social science research that have relevance for understanding group processes. Findings from these studies emphasize the powerful influence that the group as a whole has on individual group members. The chapter closes with a review of six theories: (1) systems theory, (2) psychodynamic theory, (3) learning theory, (4) field theory, (5) social exchange theory, and (6) narrative and constructivist theories, all of which have had an important influence on group work practice.

CSWE COMPETENCIES FOUND IN THIS CHAPTER

Engage In Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice
Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the historical development of group work practice in treatment groups.
- Explain how group work practice developed in task groups.
- Cite examples of knowledge gained about groups from social science research.
- Differentiate among influential theories in group work.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Knowledge from Group Work Practice and Practice Research: Treatment Groups

- Differences between Casework and Group Work

- Intervention Targets

- The Weakening of Group Work

- Current Practice Trends

- Divergent and Unified Practice Models

- Evidence-Based Group Work Practice

- The Popularity of Psycho-Educational, Structured, Practice Models

Knowledge from Group Work Practice: Task Groups

Knowledge from Social Science Research

Influential Theories

- Systems Theory

- Psychodynamic Theory

- Learning Theory

- Field Theory

- Social Exchange Theory

- Constructivist, Empowerment, and Narrative Theories

Summary

TEACHING TIPS

This chapter is designed to ground students in the traditions of social group work by informing them about the historical roots of the profession and also the social science findings that contribute to the practice base of our profession. One of the instructor's primary goals should be to help students understand that social group work has different roots and traditions than casework. It is important to inform students about the vital role that settlement houses, adult education, recreational and community centers, clubs, and institutions played in the development of social group work. Connections can be made between practice in these settings and the value base of social group work practice. Connections can also be made to the use of educational, program, and socialization activities as meaningful and historically rooted aspects of social group work practice. Good resources for instructors are the books by Kenneth Reid. With the increased importance of evidenced-based social work practice, it is also essential to help students understand how social science has contributed to social group work practice. This is especially evident in our understanding of group dynamics and their influence on group participants. The social sciences also help us to understand the importance of developing therapeutic group dynamics and how to change them as the group evolves. To make the discussion of the influence of social science more interactive, students can be asked to recall what they learned in their sociology and social psychology courses such as the famous experiments at the Hawthorne Plant in Chicago, and the experiments by Asch and Milgram that are only briefly mentioned in the book. These experiments can be put in the context of group influence, and how they inform current social group work practice. This chapter also is designed to acquaint students with the theories (ex: systems, psychodynamic, and learning theories) that have had a profound influence on the current practice of social group work. Emphasis should not be placed on the details of the theories but rather on how they influence current social group work practice. For example, the instructor can briefly talk about learning theory, but then quickly move to a description of how learning theory forms the basis for social skills training in groups, cognitive behavior therapy in groups, or behavioral activation as a treatment for depression in groups. Similarly, a brief discussion of

social exchange theory can lead to a discussion of the use of positive peer culture in therapeutic community settings, and a discussion of psychodynamic theory can lead to a discussion of the role that this theory has had on the social group worker's perceptions of how members relate to each other in self-help and long-term therapy groups.

SUGGESTED IN CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ask class members to discuss how social group work is applied in their field agency or work setting. Be sure to focus on task groups as well as treatment groups.
2. Ask class members to discuss the theories that they favor in leading groups, and why they favor the approach they are espousing. While doing this, it is possible to compare short-term structured approaches to practice with more long-term and group-centered approaches, the benefits of each, and the differential use of these approaches with different populations and problems.
3. Review the five theoretical orientations at the end of chapter 2, and ask students about their experiences applying each approach, or why they prefer one approach over the other. Compare and contrast students' views highlighting the differential usefulness of each theoretical approach.
4. Ask students to describe their own theoretical approach and how it draws on the theories that are presented in the chapter.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Class 2 Exercise: Formed and Natural Groups

Formed groups are those that come together through some outside influence or intervention. They usually have a sponsor and a particular purpose, for example, a team sorority, committee, or classroom group. Natural groups come together in a spontaneous fashion on the basis of naturally occurring events, interpersonal attraction, or the mutually perceived needs of members, for example, families, friendship groups, or gangs. Make an ecomap of your own social support network that may include both formed and natural groups. Examples include family, living group, classmates, church, neighbors placement, sorority/frat, workmates, etc.). After you have completed your ecomap find three other classmates who have completed their ecomap and form a small group. Appoint a process recorder and a leader. The leader should help the entire group discuss the types of groups they look to for support. The leader should guide the discussion by having the group members address the following questions:

1. What are similarities among members of your learning group in numbers and types of groups that provide support?
2. What kind of support do they provide (ex: instrumental, expressive)?
3. What kinds of stressors do they cause?
4. What are the differences in members' support networks?
5. What are the roles members of the learning group play in the groups?
6. How did members obtain or come to have these roles?
7. Identify which groups are formed and which are natural.
8. How does the support from formed groups differ from the support provide by the natural groups?

Note: When I use this exercise, I attach an example of an ecomap at the end of the exercise. Although most undergraduate and graduate students have already learned about ecomaps in previous practice classes, I attach an ecomap as an example to refresh students' memories, and as an example for any student who may have missed this content in previous courses.

Other Possible Activities

1. Read about the lives of two famous group workers in the early history of group work practice.
 - a. Possible sources are: NASW's *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, K. Reid's *From Character Building to Social Treatment: The History of the Use of Groups in Social Work Practice*, or A. Alissi's *Perspectives on Social Group Work Practice*.
 - b. Compare and contrast how they practiced with groups. How did their practice differ from your understanding of modern practice?
2. Interview a group worker and ask the individual to describe the theoretical foundation(s) of his or her work style. Does the worker draw on theories of group work practice in an eclectic manner or rely primarily on one theory of practice? Ask the individual to comment on the extent to which theory guides his or her day-to-day practice. Which seems to be more important to the individual: theory or practice wisdom generated from previous experience?
3. Observe a treatment group, or, if this is not possible, interview a treatment group leader. Using the characteristics described in Table 2-1, determine the extent to which the group leader is practicing within the traditions of the social goals, remedial, and reciprocal models of group work practice. To what extent does the worker blend traditions?
4. What theoretical orientation does the worker espouse? Please refer to Chapter 2 as a guide. Keep in mind, however, that the worker may be using an approach such as existentialism or solution-focused therapy that is not described in the text. What particular tradition and theory is most appealing to you? Why?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Reid, K. E. (1981). *From character building to social treatment: The history of the use of groups in social work*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Alissi, A. S. (Ed.). (1980). *Perspectives on social group work practice: A book of readings*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Papell, C. P., & Rothman, B. (1962). Social group work models: Possession and heritage. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 2*(2), 66-77.
- Forsyth, D. R., & Burnette, J. L. (2005). The history of group research. In S. A. Wheelan (Ed.), *The handbook of group research and practice* (pp. 3-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Trattner, W. I. (1999). *From poor law to welfare state: A history of social welfare in America* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

ASSESSMENT ITEMS

eText Assessments

In the new Pearson Enhanced eText for this edition, you will find embedded digital self-check quizzes for students to assess their understanding as they read, at the end of major sections in the chapters. These align with the Learning Outcomes presented at the beginning of each chapter.

These quizzes, called "Assess Your Knowledge," are multiple-choice, and contain between 1-5 items. Students click on the question mark icon in the Assess Your Knowledge box and the items "pop up" from the eText. After students select the best answer to the prompt, feedback is provided for the correct response to help scaffold learning and deepen their understanding of chapter concepts.

The following questions are not the same as the assessment items found in the Pearson Enhanced eText (digital version of this book). Pick the best possible answer from each of the four options provided with each question.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. According to Field Theory, the amount of attraction that the members of a group feel for one another is called:
 - a) Consensus
 - b) Cohesion
 - c) Gestalt
 - d) Valence
2. When the behaviors of the group members and the worker are governed by the consequences of their actions, it can be said that they are engaging in which type of learning:
 - a) Classical conditioning
 - b) Operant conditioning
 - c) Interactional conditioning
 - d) Dynamic equilibrium
3. The degree of agreement regarding goals and other group phenomena is called:
 - a) Cohesion
 - b) Valence
 - c) Consensus
 - d) Coherence
4. The theory that uses structured groups to confront, challenge and eliminate antisocial peer group norms and replace them with prosocial norms is known as:
 - a) Guided Group Interaction
 - b) Social Learning Theory
 - c) Positive Peer Culture
 - d) Both A and C
5. The potency of goals and objects in the life space of a group is called:
 - a) Cohesion

- b) Valence
 - c) Equilibrium
 - d) Potentiation
6. The model of social group work that focuses on individuals within the context of the neighborhood and the social environment is known as the:
- a) Social Goals Model
 - b) Reciprocal Model
 - c) Ecosystem Model
 - d) Interaction Model
7. A group that is designed to restore and rehabilitate group members who are behaving dysfunctionally follows the:
- a) Reciprocal Model
 - b) Remedial Model
 - c) Interaction Model
 - d) Therapeutic Community Model
8. The model of group work that is closely aligned with ecological systems theory is the:
- a) Reciprocal Model
 - b) Mainstream Model
 - c) Remedial Model
 - d) Interaction Model
9. The theory that views the group as a gestalt, or an evolving entity of opposing forces that act to hold members of the group and to move the group along in its quest for goal achievement, is:
- a) Social Learning Theory
 - b) Field Theory
 - c) Guided Group Interaction
 - d) Classical Conditioning Theory
10. According to field theory, the ability of group members to influence one another is called:
- a) Interaction
 - b) Cohesion
 - c) Power
 - d) Consensus
11. The theory of group work that focuses on the way members influence one another during social interactions is the:
- a) Social Exchange Theory
 - b) Field Theory
 - c) Interaction Theory
 - d) Social Learning Theory
12. The model of group work that helps members improve functioning and cope with life's tasks is the:
- a) Social Goals Model
 - b) Reciprocal Model
 - c) Social Learning Model

- d) Remedial Model
13. There are two types of inquiries that have enhanced our understanding of social work groups. One of these is
- Learning by doing
 - Learning by practitioners from over 100 years of practice
 - Learning from psychiatry
 - Learning from psychology
14. Another type of inquiry that comes mostly from experiments and observations of groups was done by
- Counseling psychologists
 - Social scientists
 - Adult educators
 - Recreation therapists
15. Group work grew up mainly in
- Charity organizations
 - Mental health organizations
 - Settlement houses
 - Social service agencies
16. Group work did not become linked to social work until
- Grace Coyle's book came out
 - Work with tuberculosis patients started
 - Social group workers worked in mental hospitals
 - The National Conference of Social Work in 1935
17. Compared to casework, group work is
- Much older
 - Much younger
 - A few years younger than casework
 - A few years older than casework
18. Historical differences between casework and group work do not include
- Caseworkers called their clientele clients whereas group workers called them members
 - Caseworkers worked with the poorest members of society
 - Group workers did not focus solely on the poorest members of society
 - Group workers focused mainly on problem solving and rehabilitation
19. As compared to casework group work focused on
- Group processes
 - Study, diagnosis and treatment
 - Members' weaknesses
 - Worthy people who were the victims of industrialization
20. In the 1940s and 1950s, group work focused more frequently on
- Socialization

- b) Mental health and therapy
 - c) Program activities
 - d) Self-help
21. Interest in group work in schools of social welfare weakened in the
- a) 1960s and 1970s
 - b) 1980s
 - c) 1990s
 - d) 2000s
22. According to Putman, the decline in civic engagement in voluntary associations and participation in formed groups was not caused by
- a) Time and money pressures
 - b) Mobility and sprawl
 - c) Availability of technology and the mass media
 - d) Greater differences between the wealthy and the poor
23. Attempts to revitalize social group work in social work came about from which source
- a) National Association of Social Workers
 - b) Association for the Advancement of Social Work With Groups
 - c) Society For Specialist in Group Work
 - d) International Society of Group Psychotherapy
24. The social goals model tends not to be used in
- a) Settlement houses
 - b) Girl Scouts
 - c) YMCA's
 - d) Community mental health clinics
25. Corrective emotional experiences in social group work are connected with what theory
- a) Social exchange theory
 - b) Psychodynamic therapy
 - c) Systems theory
 - d) Narrative and constructionist theories

Essay Questions

1. Describe how you might use learning theory to plan a social work group in an elementary school.
2. Describe how you might use social exchange theory to plan a social work group in a therapeutic community setting for those who abuse alcohol and/or drugs.
3. Describe the main differences between casework and group work as it was practiced early in the history of social work.
4. Describe what model of group work you would use in an outpatient mental health clinic and justify your choice of the model.
5. Describe how social scientists contributed to the knowledge base of social group work.

Chapter 2 Answer Key 1. B 2. B 3. B 4. B 5. B 6. A 7. B 8. A 9. A 10. A 11. A 12. A 13. B 14. B 15. C 16. D 17. A 18. C 19. A 20. B 21. A 22. D 23. B 24. D 25. B