The Group Work Tradition and Social Work Practice

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The social work profession is one of the primary institutions designed to help people negotiate the complicated systems in which they live. Its efforts have followed three major impulses. The most prominent of these has been to deal with people individually, "case by case," seeking to remedy the psychological and social conditions that have brought their problems about. Theories of responsibility vary with the times–individual and social, moral, economic, and psychological–but in most instances those who seek help are seen as somehow personally inadequate, and the effort is made to render them more self-sufficient, psychologically stronger, less dependent on help from the outside. The worker-client relationship is intimate, confidential, and takes place on the professional's own ground. The client is carefully examined, and the condition "diagnosed"–in the adopted medical language–as a prelude to "treatment." The rationale for this thorough personal inquiry is today largely scientific, following the. medical approach to illness. But the

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tradition goes back a long way. Thomas Chalmers, an early precursor of the Charity Organization movement, said of those who came to seek economic assistance: "He who seeks another's bounty shall also submit to another's scrutiny.[1] This one-on-one approach to human problems is the discipline we have called social casework, and it has been the dominant feature of the social work profession since its inception.

A second direction has been to help needy people in their own milieux, surrounded by their peers and working in an atmosphere of mutual aid. Here the effort is to find, in the people's own conditions of life, the energy and the resources with which they can help each other act together on common problems. People are brought together for many reasons: to organize themselves for action on special interests and common concerns: to help each other face difficult personal problems; to learn new skills with which to enrich the quality of their lives. The setting is the small, face-to-face group, placed in some shared community context; experiences are communicated among the members, rather than held confidential between member and worker; and the worker is surrounded by a host of surrogate helpers, each claiming a share of the supportive function. The lines of communication are intricate, and the worker's authority is diffused in the network of relationships that goes to make up the pattern of mutual aid. This is the direction we came to know as social group work, and it has grown over the years to occupy an increasingly significant place in the work of the profession.

The third approach has been to deal with the social problems themselves, rather than the people who suffer under their effects. The lines between direct service and social planning have not always been distinct, nor has it been necessary that they be so. In fact, both the early settlements and the Charity Organization movement were prime. examples of the integration of direct practice and what we now call community organization and social reform. But the deepening troubles of industrial capitalism, and the accompanying complexities administering social welfare, created this specialized field, with its own knowledge and skills, that addressed itself to the tasks of social and legislative action, the development and distribution of resources, intergroup cooperation, and–maintaining its ties to direct service–the organization of grass-roots action on community problems.

The history of social work is the story of how these different ways of helping people in need came together to find a single professional identity. In 1873, the National Conference of Charities and Correction first offered the humanitarians a chance to share their common aspirations and working problems.[2] In the 1920's, the Milford Conference found

some theoretical unity for social casework, at a time when that was considered tantamount to integrating the entire profession.[3] And in the 1950's, the National Association of Social Workers was born of a long organizational process that merged seven independent social work organizations into a single association that represented social workers of America who had formal educational preparation.[4,5]

The search for a common identity for social work did not end when this union was effected. Today, a generation later, it still remains to find the common technology that could render its practitioners recognizable as part of a single professional entity. It has been relatively easy to describe the common objectives, the shared values, even the relevant areas of knowledge; but it has been much more difficult to define the basic skills that bind them together and constitute a special claim to conpetence in serving the community. Parsons, in his study of the legal profession, defined the professional as a "technical expert . . . by virtue of his mastery of the tradition and skills of its use."[6] How would such a principle be applied to social work? What is its common tradition, and to what special skills does it lay its claim? What abilities do the family worker, the camp director, the organizer, the club leader, the clinician-therapist have in common? Are they in any measure interchangeable, considering that they all hold the same graduate degree?

It is, of course, the old search for the generic, in a jungle of specifics. The merger of professional associations, however desirable it may have been, left yet to be done the task of merging the separate experiences and histories of social work into a commonly understood way of working with people. Although structurally unified, the profession is still more like a coalition of the old "methods" than it is an integrated discipline combining the richest and most effective elements of each.

It is true that such development does not happen overnight; the Milford Conference, for example, took close to a decade to sort out the generic and the specific in social casework. In our own generation, we have had some thoughtful work on the subject,[7,8] and there will be more. But I believe that such an effort would be considerably advanced if each of the so-called "methods" were to explore its own traditions of practice to find those unique elements that might help to put its own special stamp on a unified conception of the function and practice of social work. My effort here is to examine something of the group work heritage, looking back on some of its early history, its theoretical underpinnings, its conception of the client, the worker-member relationship, and its conduct of the helping process. In a short paper, one can only touch

on the main themes; but 1 would hope to give some of the flavor of such an enterprise, and stimulate others to work along similar lines.[9]

The Early Years

There is a common misconception that group work is considerably younger than its casework sibling. In fact, the ancestors of both movements began their work at about the same time in history, with the group work agencies following the casework establishments by only a few years. Canon Barnett, the founder of the first settlement–Toynbee Hall in London–was a close associate of Octavia Hill, who played a similar role in the beginnings of the London Charity Organization Society; Barnett was in fact influential in both movements.[10] In this country, Jane Addams and Mary Richmond were colleagues and very much aware that they were part of a common enterprise. Both in England and in the United States, the settlements and the Societies were not far apart: the London COS in 1868, Toynbee Hall in 1884, the Buffalo COS in 1877, Jane Addams's Hull-House in 1889. As to the seminal works in both fields, Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* was issued in 1917,[11] while Grace Coyle's *Social Process in Organized Groups* came in 1930.[12] In general, the early workers were all part of the same group of social reformers that came out of the Progressive Era. Their motives were much the same, and they knew and worked with each other long before the casework-group work distinctions were drawn. Canon Barnett's favored motto–embroidered and hung in his drawing room in Whitechapel–was "One By One.[13]

The historical difference between the two movements was that casework, or individual work, became almost immediately synonymous with social work as its practitioners sprang into action, defined themselves as a body, formed a national conference, began to systematize their thinking,[14] and produced a steady stream of writing about their experiences in the field. The group workers, on the other hand, were much more diverse in their outlook, identifying themselves with many fields of endeavor, among them education, recreation, camping, and mental hygiene–each with a tradition of its own going back to 1861[15]–as well as social work. The American Association for the Study of Group Work, founded in 1936, numbered among its members people from all these professions, as well as those with purely academic and scientific interest in the small group, without any particular reference to its professional uses.

This wide range of interests and allegiances was reflected in a study of the leisure-time agencies in the 1920's, which concluded that "the objectives of these various agencies would at first thought seem so divergent as to make it impossible to treat the duties and responsibilities of their workers in the same analysis."[16]

Group work's ambivalence about where it belonged continued even after its place was established, both in social work education and as part of the National Conference of Social Work, in the mid-'30s. In 1940, the noted educator William Heard Kilpatrick asserted that "this group work is . . . not to be thought of as a separate field of work, but rather as a method to be used in all kinds of educational effort."[17] And as late as 1946, we find Grace Coyle herself still concerned about the "alignment" of group workers: "One baffling problem has plagued the development of professional consciousness among group workers over this decade. It is usually phrased in terms of alignment, and a dilemma is presented. We must, it seems, be either educators or social workers."[18]

Ultimately, the choice was made, and group work practitioners found their place within the social work profession. It was, after all, group work's natural habitat, having had its origins in the humanitarian movement and its major development within the agencies of social welfare.

> Social work, with its early emphasis on the individual in his environment, was a congenial host for those whose work lay at the very point of interaction between the two. Social work's concern with the total individual, the importance of community life, and the role of government in human affairs offered a comfortable resting place for group work's unique blend of scientific, humanitarian, and missionary zeal. . . .[19]

It was at that point that the question changed from whether group workers would identify themselves as social workers to what they would bring with them into a unified field of practice. Undoubtedly, there was much in their world view that was the same as that of the other approaches within the profession. But there must also be, from the settings and circumstances of their encounters with human beings in need, a great deal that was different, through which group work could make a valuable contribution to a generic conception of the work of the profession. To find these, one would have to look closely at several key areas in their collective early experience.

Group Work Purposes

If the caseworkers were the "priests" of social welfare, and the social planners were its "prophets," the group workers were a kind of cross between the two.[20] On the one hand, they were deeply involved in direct service to the poor, ministering to their needs in day-to-day contact; on the other, because they worked where the people lived, they were first-hand witnesses to the cramped quality of the people's lives and the limitations of a political and economic system in which huge sections of the population were neglected, uninvolved, and relegated to the fringes of power. Catherine Cooke Gilman suggested that the motto of the settlements might be: "Keep your fingers on the near things and eyes on the far things."[21]

These were the twin emphases that pervaded the work of the first agencies–the "near things" of individual need and the "far things" of social reform. On the one hand, the early settlement papers were replete with references to "self": self-development, self-sufficiency, self-respect, and the like.[22] At the same time, there was a strong preoccupation with the need for education for political power. "If power is to be dispersed, then everybody is to he trained to exercise it. . . . Democracy becomes a farce, not because it has lost its ideal force but because its devotees are, democratically speaking, illiterate; they do not know how to operate in and through groups."[23]

In order to provide a new version of society, a community in which people could regain some control over their immediate environment, the early workers turned to the small group as a context for action. This connection between individual and social strength may seem naive to us today, but it appeared to the settlement pioneers to be compelling; they had an enormous faith in human association, and the small group was to be an instrument of personal growth as well as what they called a "building block of democracy." Jane Addams spoke of exchanging "the music of isolated voices [for] the volume and strength of the chorus."[24] And Canon Barnett said: ". . . if it be a great matter to be an individual, it is a greater matter to be part of a whole . . ."[25]

Underlying all of these purposes, there lay the urge to restore to the people those aspects of life that had been denied to them by the ravages of industrialization. The crowded city streets, the dearth of recreational opportunities, the absence of trees and country spaces, the lack of time for play–all of these produced a great yearning for space, country, and leisure. It was the need that spawned Barnett's Children's Country Holiday Fund in England, and vitalized the camping and playground move-

ments in this country. The group work pioneers waxed particularly eloquent on the subject of play. "A people's play," said Mrs. Henrietta Barnett, "is a fair test of a people's character. Their recreation more than their business or their conquests settle the nations' place in history."[26] And consider this paean to its virtues:

> Play has physical, psychological, social, ethical, and spiritual significance. . . . Play is joy-producing and hence develops mental optimism. Play naturally and unconsciously places the individual in right relations with his social group. Play is the testing-laboratory of the individual and the social virtues. Play rounds out our fragmentary lives and makes us spiritually whole.[27]

This concern with enhancing the quality of life was at the heart of the preoccupation with cultural activities–music, art, literature, drama, trips, discussion–as well as occasions, entertainments, and general atmosphere of intimate and informal exchange. Barnett claimed that his ultimate resource was his wife's tea-table.[28] The themes of informality, social intercourse, shared experience, and, above all, friendship, were at the very roots of the settlement movement. Friendship was the bond that would unite them all–the residents and the neighbors, workers and members. Indeed friendship was to be a political instrument. The young, well-favored, well-to-do students who came to the first university settlements–of which Toynbee Hall was one–were being trained to rule more wisely by making real friendships with the poor and learning at first hand their way of life. The class struggle was in their eyes a product of misunderstanding between the rich and the poor, and it could be mitigated by working out these failures of communication on the people's home ground. "The classes are out of joint," wrote Barnett "and do not work together to one end. The call is still for a way of peace, and for a means of promoting good fellowship between man and man.[29]

And so group work came to the people with an active agenda and a sackful of hopes and prayers for individual salvation and social change. Although Barnett himself went to some pains to point out that settlements are not missions, and should not be used for "doing good," or for preaching a message,[30] the total effect over the years has been to invest the worker-client engagement with urgent conviction and well-marked educational purposes. Later, when "cause" began to edge its way toward "function," there would be considerable difficulty in distinguishing means from ends. But there was rarely any danger that the group workers would go passive, or neutral, about what the world should be

like. They would carry their strong sense of the individual-social connections with them into the social work arena. It was a heavy load, and they often carried it clumsily; but always the worker was an active and intimate participant in the client's experience.

It was a new kind of relationship, this collaboration between a worker and the members of a group, and it raised questions that went beyond the Freudian explanations that were being studied so intently by the rest of the profession. Unbound as they were to any one field of exploration, they had a whole world to turn to; and they did–to the educators, the sociologists, the psychologists, and the host of disciplines that were exploding with new insights at the turn of the 20th century.

Theoretical Foundations

The intellectual renaissance that took place in America as part of the Progressive Era was in many ways responsive to the needs and curiosities of the group work movement. New knowledge came from many directions–religious, philosophical, social, psychological, political–and the group workers, not yet tied to any hard-and-fast identifications, were free to look where they chose for enlightenment and inspiration. The Freudian answers found some ready group work adherents, as they did in casework, but the fit was uncomfortable, the explanations skirting many of the situational questions raised by the group experience. It was not that the group workers had no interest in personality development; obviously they must have. But their point of vantage led them to observe human behavior in its social, relational context. Their curiosities were essentially what we would now call *systemic*, having to do with interrelational networks; and their questions were oriented to issues of action and interaction, the nature of shared experience, and the processes of communication–verbal and nonverbal–within the small group.

Their field of inquiry was broad, and it would take a much longer work than this to trace the precise connections between the growing body of early 20th century knowledge and the development of group work thinking. But certain influences are fairly clear, and important to our present purpose. The great progenitor of small-group analysis was, of course, Charles Horton Cooley, whose researches into the nature of the primary group provided a profound rationale for the social uses of human togetherness. It was Cooley who took his stand against the opposition of self and society, uniting these into a single, unified concept. He said: "By primary groups I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses,

but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual.[31] It was a radical idea, and it explained much of the group workers' experience with people. ". . . human nature is not something existing separately in the individual, but a *group-nature* . . . "[32] And he echoed another part of their experience as he described the feeling of "we": "one lives in the feeling of the whole and finds the chief aims of his will in that feeling."[33]

The concept of the social nature of human personality was a landmark in our intellectual history, and it was highly congenial to those who worked in the context of community. The group workers turned to others with the same idea–Baldwin,[34] Kropotkin,[35] and Dewey[36] in the early years, and later Mead,[37] Sherif,[38] Lewin,[39] and the host of others that followed. The implications of this insight moved directly to the heart of one of the great issues of group work practice, namely the persistent tendency to dichotomize the needs of individuals and those of the collective. Baldwin put it this way:

> It is, to my mind, the most remarkable outcome of modern social theory–the recognition of the fact that the individual's normal growth lands him in essential solidarity with his fellows, while on the other hand the exercise of his social duties and privileges advances his highest and purest individuality.[40]

Like all great insights, this one raised new questions to replace those it answered. How, for example, did one understand the processes of interaction between people who were not fixed entities but social creations, the ever-changing products of those same interactions? For this they turned to Mary Follett, an ex-settlement worker in working-class Boston, who wrote books analyzing the group experience, the uses of authority, the nature of freedom, and similar, eagerly debated, issues affecting group work practice. Her concept of "circular behavior" emphasized the *reverberating* character of human exchanges, in which each actor responds to a situation he helped create a moment ago. She pointed out that "response is always to a relation. I respond, not only to you, but to the relation between you and me."[41] This idea took on considerable meaning as workers tried to describe a helping process in which they did not attempt to change the fixed and immutable "personality" of their members, but viewed both client and worker as in a continuing process of shifting and changing under the moment-by-moment impact of each upon the other. In the spontaneous, ever-active ambience of the group experience, this latter version, however difficult to de-

scribe, was felt to be closer to experience than the subject-object, "`change-agent," what Buber was later to call the "I-It" rather than the "I-Thou"[42] version of the helping process.

It was a day-by-day discovery of the group workers that communication was only partly a formal, verbal affair, and that much of the human exchange could be read in the language of action-in games, body language, and expressive play. In this area, their teacher was Neva Leona Boyd. Using her long experience as a pioneer of the recreation movement, and taking her cues from the literature of spontaneity and progressive education, she asserted that "the only morality there is is bound up with action."[43] She urged the group workers to free themselves "from the limitations imposed by an overemphasis on verbalized aspects of expression. "[44] And she said: "Only in the spontaneous, uncalculated response of human beings to each other can sensitivity to undefined subtleties function."[45]

There was a great deal more, and as the field moved into the '30s and '40s, it was Grace Coyle and her colleagues who pulled it all together and made it into a syllabus. The time for building their own theoretical base was getting short; there would be less than ten years between the formation of the American Association of Group Workers in 1446 and its merger into the National Association of Social Workers in 1455, and there were many important questions left to be resolved.

The Group Work Client

There are those who claim that all of social work is a kind of "battlefield medicine," in which the object is to patch up the victims as best one can and put them back in the field as soon as possible. If this is so, then the triage was arranged so that the group workers took those who were the less incapacitated and somewhat more capable of conducting their affairs as part of a small community. This is not to say, as it is so often, that their people were "normal"–there are so few of those around–but simply that they had enough energy to engage themselves with others in common tasks. The emphasis was on working with strengths, rather than curing illness. At the 1935 National Conference of Social Work, LeRoy Bowman said: "Group work . . . is not a service to those who ask for help-it is the social mechanism perfectly competent people utilize to achieve their own ends."[46] And just as Virginia Robinson had written that "one does not go to a [casework] agency joyfully,[47] Grace Coyle stresses the "true enjoyment [that] comes when the self is . . . actively and vitally engaged, its powers expanding in fulfillment. "[48]

Thus it was that the very concept of "client" was somewhat strange, even distasteful, for many group workers, preferring as they did the designation of "member." Bowman was careful to make a point of this at the same conference in 1935, asserting that group workers "must help to relate the members of their groups (I did not say 'clients') to the national or mass concerns of the day."[49] The argument about terms was, of course, part of the aforementioned ambivalence about social work itself; but it had a deeper significance in that the "member" orientation helped bring millions of new middle-class consumers into group work's field of action, as the group work skills were sought out by the youth movements, community centers, "Y"s, and Jewish Centers that were coming into being all over the country.

The distinction between "client" and "member" was not always easy to maintain; group workers were constantly dealing with group members who were struggling under a heavy load of personal problems as they tried to meet the demand for responsible group participation. Thus workers faced what came increasingly to feel like a choice between their concern for individuals in trouble and their aspirations for the group as a whole. Here again was the self-society dilemma in its practice manifestation: whether to get on with the collective tasks or to stop for those who needed help in catching up with the others. The "choice," though it was much discussed, always turned out to be an illusion, in the small group as in the larger community: when one "chose" the individual and abandoned the others, the group foundered and all suffered; and when the worker addressed himself exclusively to the collective, ignoring those who needed special help, there was a mounting residue of anger and guilt, felt by both members and worker.

Out of this dilemma there emerged what has been called the "two clients" conception, in which the worker's function is to help both the individual and the group, the one to meet his needs within the system, the other to pursue its collective tasks. The value of this idea was that it called for considerable skill and forced the worker to try to unify his responsibility for both the individual and the group, instead of hovering indecisively between the two, always worrying about whether he should be sacrificing one for the other.

But the trouble with the "two clients" idea was that it was still dualistic in nature. While "both" was superior to "either-or," it was really only a different version of it, and it tended to produce a kind of pseudo-solution that obscured a deeper insight into the problem. What was needed was a closer look at the working relationship between a person and his group, to find the common need, the common ground, the

common impetus that carried them toward each other.[50] In this view, the worker's function was to act as a bridge across which the individual could reach out to negotiate the system of demands and opportunities offered by his group, while at the same time helping the collective reach out to incorporate each of its members in the group life.[51] The worker would thus define his "client"–or his major responsibility–as neither the individual nor the group, but the *processes* that passed between them. The group workers had learned about process from Dewey, Follett, Lindeman, and others; it was a natural outgrowth of their interest in social action and social experience. It was no accident that Coyle's first landmark publication was called *Social Process in Organized Groups*, while Mary Richmond's was entitled *Social Diagnosis*.

The group workers could not always muster the skills necessary to help carry people and their significant groups toward each other; the burden of process is not easy to carry in a product-oriented society. Nevertheless, operating where these problems were always right before their eyes, they could not but form the habit of viewing people in their social context. When they looked at an individual–be he "client" or "member"–they could not fail to see him as surrounded by his culture, his family, and his friends.

The Worker-Client Relationship

The earliest conception of the helping relationship in group work was of one that took place within a community of equals. As I have indicated, the theme of friendship was paramount in the minds of the founders: "Charity is friendship," said Canon Barnett, "and. . . institutions which don't give friends are not charity."[52] The Charity Organization Society also used the slogan "not alms but a friend,[53] but the settlements used the term literally, and carried it into action with its daily opportunities for physical contact, joint action, group entertainments, and the like.

The theme of camaraderie–of comradeship as an instrument of helping–had a lasting effect on the development of the group work tradition. It became a subject of humor in the sophisticated fellowship into which it subsequently entered, but when the idea of friendship was later transformed into that of leadership, the group workers found themselves formulating an important problem in the uses of professional authority. How did one maintain an active, intimate, spontaneous relationship with a person in need, while yet retaining the distance and discipline necessary to carry out a professional function? How did a worker act freely without acting out?

Freud's discovery of the "transference" in the doctor-patient relationship[54] was a revelation to workers in the helping disciplines, and it was eagerly taken up by the newly emerging social work profession. He had written that "eventually all the conflicts must be fought out on the field of transference," and, in advising physicians on the use of the psychoanalytic method, he had laid great stress on the absolute "impenetrability" of the doctor in the face of this phenomenon:

> The loosening of the transference, too–one of the main tasks of the cure–is made more difficult by too intimate an attitude on the part of the doctor, so that a doubtful gain in the beginning is more than cancelled in the end. Therefore I do not hesitate to condemn this kind of technique as incorrect. The physician should be impenetrable to the patient, and, like a mirror, reflect nothing but what is shown to him.[56]

Obviously, such a doctrine, however useful in helping workers understand more deeply the meaning of professional authority, was difficult to apply directly in the hustle-bustle of the group experience. And, as we might expect, there was some horror at the prospect. Again it was Bowman who stated the problem:

> Any good group worker knows, as does any good progressive teacher, that such a relationship is the opposite of that desired by the group leader. It is not transference to the leader at all, but cross transference between the members, that should form the dynamic influence in group activities.[57]

In this area as in others, the group workers found the new, system-oriented ideas more congenial to their experience. While always troubled by their tendency towards counter-transference, and their vulnerability to its effects, it was difficult to remain "impenetrable" in a game of steal-the-bacon, or a trip to a strange place, or a discussion of serious group problems. But they could echo to Follett's description of the helping relationship as circular and reciprocal–"a reaction to a relating." And they could respond to her brilliant insight, realized as early as the '20s, that leadership was not essentially a factor of personality–what she called "ascendency traits"–but a functional, situational manifestation. "Don't exploit your personality," she said to them. "*Learn your job*."[58]

Later in their development, the group workers would be heavily influenced by Grace Coyle's distillation of the educational process and her conception of the *mentoring* and *modelling* aspects of the professional relationship.

> In this interacting mesh of life, whatever the content of program, teaching and learning are a mutual process. If the leader is himself achieving his own guiding values, his own delight in excellence, his own deep sense of the validity and meaning of life, his own ability to function as part of the social whole, that achieving by a kind of delicate osmosis is likely to be his most significant contribution to his group.[59]

Thus the traditional worker-member relationship in group work was that of a co-active, reciprocal, functional, first-among-equals, mentoring collaboration in the pursuit of group tasks. What kind of helping process was it that emerged from all this?

On the Nature of Helping

The legacy of group work, like that of many of the helping professions, lies more in its accumulated experience and its sense of social purpose than in its understanding of its own technical skills. Towley commented on this at about the time when group work was merging its identity with that of the social work profession:

> This specialized field is rich in democratic concepts; it has a wealth of examples; but in professionally unique concepts, "method theory," it has been curiously poor. . . . It is possible that no social or economic class in a community is beyond profiting from what goes on under the name of a "group experience." But it is difficult for a social group worker to communicate how and why this near-miracle happens, except to another group worker.[60]

It was true; but from their "wealth of examples"–that is, the social history of their experiences with people–it is possible to bring into clearer focus some of the action implications of what the group workers thought about their purpose, knowledge, professional relationships, and the rest. Given these conceptions, and given the demands of the settings in which they worked, they were compelled to fashion certain kinds of working skills. Whether or not they were always equal to these de-

mands–early records leave some doubts on that score–the group workers nevertheless developed certain perspectives on the helping process that were unique to their calling.

First, since the worker found himself located inside the group members' sphere of activity–a part of their play, their talk, and their transactions–his comments had to be made not as a detached observer and interpreter but as an active participant with his own functional stake in the proceedings. The concept of "intervention," although it would later become fashionable, was essentially inappropriate since one does not "intervene" in a system from the inside; it is a contradiction in terms. Within the system, the worker's function was to provide the skills with which to mediate the transactions between each individual and the group, reinforcing the energies with which they reached out to each other. In this position, two major, concurrent tasks are faced: on the one hand, to help each member come to grips with the worker's authority and use it to the member's own advantage; while at the same time, to help members use each other in the collective effort. Later, Bennis and Shepard and others would teach them more about these processes of *authority* and *intimacy*, how they operated, and the connections between the two.[61] But whether or not they understood exactly what was happening, group workers' skills were fashioned by such demands, as were their conceptions of the helping process in action.

Second, since the workings of groups made them often restless and mobile, group work skills were at the outset less tuned to introspection and the pursuit of insight than to the advancement of action. Their early interest in non-verbal, extra-logical forms of communication had helped them develop proficiency in many of the expressive phenomena–phantasy, play, drama, music, travelling, and the rest; it is only recently that formal courses in these "program" subjects have been dropped from the graduate school curricula. What remains, however, is the sensitivity to the language of action, and the awareness that talk and action are not antithetical, the former serious and the latter trivial and distracting, but different, often simultaneous, aspects of the communication between worker and clients.

Third, it was not possible for the worker to maintain an orderly and logical progression of ideas when constantly being called upon to react quickly in the press of events. The agenda was often controlled by impulse and feeling, and the worker had to develop the ability to make quick connections and find underlying themes, protecting professional purposes even while moving spontaneously into the action. The sight of a worker sitting wrapped in thought while those around him were feel-

ing and acting was not calculated to inspire confidence in the interest and empathy of professional help. It was not possible for a worker successfully to urge freedom and openness on one's members while serving as a model of caution and circumspection. It called for considerable risking on the worker's part; but risking, after all, was a major ingredient in the client's prescription, and it was a poor sort of authority that gave the message to the client to "do as I say, not as I do."

Finally, since the members' main source of enjoyment and profit came from their ability to show their strengths with others, the group workers had to develop the skills with which to help the members find those strengths and use them in the group. The workers' efforts were primitive at first, relying heavily on urging and exhortation. Later, taught by Alfred Adler, Carl Rogers, and the ego psychologists, they fashioned more sophisticated techniques to mobilize client strength: partializing difficult issues; reaching for real feelings; using role-playing to help translate feelings into action; turning members toward each other for support and reality-testing; reaching for ideas that were hard to express publicly; and connecting private troubles with group concerns.

One could explore many more aspects of the group work gestalt that emerged from the need to do a helping job within a setting that, because it was social, public, and on the clients' home ground, made unusual demands upon the worker. This is not to say that the helping process in group work was *sui generis*, or totally different from other approaches; indeed the point of this paper is that it was only a special manifestation of social work in action. But, over and above the similarities, group work's special character lay in the fact that its experience brought into focus certain phenomena that are less easily seen when the work is private, one-on-one, and under the worker's almost total control.

Toward an Expanded Paradigm

The old settlement idea of the helping relationship as a shared experience meant that residents and neighbors, workers and group members, were on a voyage of discovery, affecting each other's lives, tied together with a common bond, fulfilling each one's own special purposes in the process. The idea was drawn from the very air of Victorian society; it was class-dominated, idealistic, and amateurish in many ways. But its deeper truth lay in its vision of a relationship in which the qualities of leadership were expressed in the joys of human collaboration, rather than in the action of the knower on the naive, the strong on the weak, the expert on the uninitiated. As I have indicated, the intimacy of

worker and members created the need to guard one's function carefully, lest it be lost in the close exchange. But the opposite view–detached, "objective," and often identified as more *truly* professional–raises a more serious problem; the distance between worker and client is then so large, and the worker's position on the periphery of the system so secure, that there is no longer any risk at all, and the worker is too safe to worry about it. The group worker's emotional involvement, and tenuous control of the situation, felt dangerous but it was often salutary. Caseworkers who have moved into service with groups have experienced this sense of danger as the feeling, "there are so many of them and only one of me?"[62] They have found that

> . . . the group leadership role demands that the worker give up much of the interview control to which she has, often unconsciously, become accustomed. Caseworkers have often told me that they had never realized how rigidly they controlled the client-worker interaction until they began to function as group workers, where changes of subject could be effected by anyone in the group, where people often turned to each other rather than to the worker for reinforcement and support, where clients could verify each other's "wrong" ideas, where mutually reinforced feelings could not be turned off when they became "dangerous," and where, in short, one's faith in the client's autonomy and basic strength were put to its severest test.[63]

These are the themes of shared control, shared power, and the shared agenda, which are among those I have tried to identify in this paper. That their appearance is so disconcerting to those who first move into group service speaks well for their potential uses in helping to evolve a richer model of the helping process in social work. Each theme needs to be explored in some detail: the social self, the faith in action, the helping relationship as a reciprocal system, the shared power, the sense of immediacy, the eclecticism, the collective sources of individual strength, and even, in some respects, the didacticism that pervaded the group workers' outlook.

The ideas themselves are not new; many have in certain ways been accepted over the years. But they are easy to lose sight of, in a model of practice–perhaps it is the coveted medical model–of a unilateral power exercised over an objectified, inert, malleable client. For example, the definition of the self as a social creation, culturally formed and culturally modifiable, is well ensconced in today's scientific atmosphere; but

it is hard to keep before us in the paradigm of the client as a broken object who comes to be repaired by an agent of change who operates single-handedly on self-contained, privately-owned personalities.

As to what it is that does help people change in their own chosen direction,[64] that question will be with us for a long time. The group workers' experience told them that there was something in the nature of *doing*, and particularly collective doing, that helped people find new ways of looking at themselves and the world around them. Many, like Neva Boyd, suspected verbal and logical explanations that went under the name of "insight," but seemed to produce more "aha"s than lasting changes in problem-solving behavior. And it was Kierkegaard, a generation before Freud, who said that "truth exists for the individual only as he himself produces it in action."[65] Ultimately, of course, the answer will lie not in pitting action against insight, but in finding the connections between the two, and the techniques with which to distinguish real understanding from verbal games, and meaningful action from a mechanical behaviorism.

And so it would go: there is obviously a great deal more to be done with these issues than can be attempted here. The major threads are reciprocal, systemic, existential, and would lead us back into studies that might rescue these constructs from their stereotypes and translate them back into their implications for practice, both one-to-one and one-to-group. For the present, this brief analysis may help bring their roots in the group work experience back into view and lead the profession forward in the process of locating the traditions that indeed make up the profession.

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