

their needs and capacities to the end of individual, group and community development (Trecker, 1955).

Group work is a broad professional practice that refers to the group setting. It involves the application of group theory and process by a capable professional practitioners to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals, which may be personal, interpersonal or task-related in nature (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 1990).

Historical Development of Group Work

In order to develop a broad perspective concerning the potential uses of groups in social work practice, it is helpful to understand the developments that have occurred in the study of groups and in the practice of group work over the years. This historical perspective will also give you a firm foundation upon which a knowledge base can be built upon for effective group work practice.

Two types of inquiries have enhanced our understanding of groups. One type of inquiry has come from social scientists who have studied groups by experimenting with them in laboratories or observations of group's functioning in community setting. The other type has come from group work practitioners who have examined how groups function in practice settings like social work, psychology, education and recreation. The results of both enquiries have led to improved methods of working with a variety of different types of groups.

A basic research question that was asked by social scientist concerns the extent to which being a part of a group influences the individual group member. The early findings suggest that the presence of others has a significant influence on an individual group member

and tends to generate forces to conform to the standards of behaviour and judgments of individual members. Le Bon in 1910 referred to the forces that were generated by group interaction as 'group contagion' and 'group mind', recognising that people in groups react differently from individuals.

The concept of a primary group was also an important contribution to the study of groups. Cooley in 1909 defined a primary group as a small informal group such as family or a friendship group, which has a tremendous influence on member's values, moral standards and normative behaviour. The primary group was therefore viewed as essential in understanding socialisation and development. Allport (1924) for example, found that presence of others improved task performance.

After World War I, social scientists also began to study groups operating in the community. One of the earliest was Frederic Thrasher (1927) who studied gangs of delinquents in the Chicago area by becoming friendly with gang members and by observing the internal operations of gangs. Thrasher observed that every member of a gang had a status within the group that was attached to the functional role that the member played for the gang. Thrasher also drew attention to the culture that developed within a gang, suggesting there was a common code that all members followed. The code was enforced by group opinion, coercion and physical punishment. This work along with others have influenced the ways group work is practiced with youths in settlement houses, neighbourhood centres and youth organisations.

Later some group workers relied on naturalistic observations of groups of boys in a summer camp to demonstrate how cohesion and intergroup hostility develop. Social scientists also learned more about

people's behaviour in groups from studies done in industry and in the United States Army.

During the 1950s an explosion of knowledge concerning small groups took place. The major themes that developed in the first half of the twentieth century includes conformity, communication and interaction patterns, leadership, interpersonal preference and social perception, that are important components while dealing with group process in social work. It is also important to mention the contribution of psychoanalytic theory, learning theory, field theory, social exchange theory and the system theory that explains group functioning, the details of which will be discussed elsewhere.

Casework began in England and the United States in Charity Organisations in the late nineteenth century and group work grew up largely in English and American settlement houses. Group work was also used for therapeutic purpose in state mental institutions but much of the interest in group work stemmed from those who had led socialisation groups, adult education groups and recreation groups in settlement houses and youth service agencies.

It is often believed that group work is considerably younger than casework, but group work agencies actually started only a few years after casework agencies. The first course of group work was offered in the School of Social Work at Western Reserve University in Cleveland by Clara Kaiser. When she left for New York in 1935, Grace Coyle continued to develop the course. It was taught partially as a method and partially as a field of practice. By 1937 about 10 schools offered special course in social work. However, as Schwartz points out, the real historical differences between the two is that casework soon became identified with social work

profession where as group work did not begin to become formally linked with the profession until much later during the National Conference of Social Work in 1935. In 1936 the American Association for the study of group work was founded with an aim to clarify and refine both the philosophy and practice of group work. By 1939 group work began to be treated as a separate subject at the National Conference of Social Work. The identification of group work with social work profession increased during the 1940s although group workers continued to maintain loose ties with recreation, adult education, and mental hygiene until the 1950s when group workers joined together with six other professional groups to form the National Association of Social Workers in 1955.

The use of group work in settlement houses and casework in Charity Organisations was not an accident. Group work and the Settlement houses where it was practiced offered citizens the opportunity for education, recreation, socialisation and community involvement. Unlike Charity Organisations that primarily focussed on the diagnosis and treatment of the problems of the poor, settlement houses offered groups as an opportunity for citizens to join together to share their views, to gain mutual support and to exercise the power derived from their association for social change.

Unlike casework, where there is a sharp distinction between the given and the receiver, group work evolved out of the idea of self-help, self-help of a group nature. While philanthropy was generally of middle class origin, mutual self-help as the name implies, developed from the need for mutual aid and support. As compared to caseworkers who relied on insight developed from psychodynamic approaches and on the provision of concrete resources, group workers relied on programme

activities to spur members to action. Programme activities of all types were the medium through which group attained their goals. Activities such as camping, singing, group discussion, games and arts and crafts were used for recreation, socialisation, education, support and rehabilitation. Unlike casework, which was largely focussed on problem solving and rehabilitation, group work activities were used for enjoyment as well as to solve problems. Thus the group work method that developed from the settlement house work had a different focus and a different goal than casework method.

Differences between casework and group work can also be clearly seen in the helping relationships. Caseworkers sought out the most underprivileged victims of industrialisation, treating 'worthy' clients by providing them with resources and acting as good examples of virtuous, hardworking citizens. Although they also worked with those who were impaired and those who were poor, group worker did not focus solely on the poorest cases or on those with the most problems. They preferred the word *members to client*. They emphasised working with member's strengths rather than their weakness. Helping was seen as a shared relationship in which the group worker and the group members worked together for mutual understanding and action regarding their common concerns for the community in which they lived. As concerns were identified, group members acted to support and to help one another and the worker acted as a mediator between the demands of society and the needs of group members.

Shared interaction, shared power and shared decision making placed demands on the group worker that were not experienced by caseworkers. Group workers frequently had to act quickly during complex and often fast paced group interactions while remaining aware of

the welfare of all group members. The number of group members, the fact that they could turn to one another for help and the democratic decision making process that were encouraged in groups meant that group workers had to develop skills that were different from those of caseworkers.

Between 1910 and 1920, those who were concerned with adult education, recreation, and community work began to realise the full potentials of group work. They began to understand that groups could be used to help people participate in their communities to enrich people's lives and to support those persons whose primary relationship were not satisfying. They became aware of the potential that groups had for helping people learn social skills and problem-solving skills. They began to use groups to prevent delinquency and to rehabilitate those who were maladjusted. The organisations that build the foundation of group work were the self-help and informal recreational ones: settlement houses, neighbourhood centres, Y's, the Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Jewish centers and camps. Latter designated as 'group work agencies' the new concepts that united these services are participation in small groups, the democratic way of life, community responsibility and membership in a worldwide effort.

Early in 1920 Mary Richmond realised the potentials of working with groups and wrote on the importance of small group psychology. Mary P Follett, a political scientist in 1926 wrote in the book — *The New State*, that solutions to social problems would emerge from the creation of groups in neighbourhood and around social interest. John Dewey, who developed the idea of progressive education also found the usefulness of small groups as early as 1933. According to him, social group work method was an application of the principles of

progressive education to small informal groups in leisure time settings. In fact, group work was very closely associated with community organisation method and its concept of citizen's participation.

During the 1940s and 1950s group workers began to use groups more frequently to provide therapy and remediation in mental health settings influenced by the psychoanalysis and ego psychology and partly of World War II, which created a severe shortage of trained workers to deal with mentally disabled war veterans. It was spurred on by the continued interest in the use of groups in psychiatric settings during the 1950s.

Although there was an increased emphasis in the 1940s and 1950s on utilising groups to improve the functioning of individual group members, interest remained in using groups for recreational and educational purposes, especially in Jewish community centres and in youth organisations such as Girls Scouts and the YWCA. During the 1940s and 1950s groups were also used for purposes of community development and social action in many different neighbourhood centres and community agencies. At the same time, there was an accompanying increase in the study of small group as a social phenomenon.

The years after the war saw an immense rise in group work literature. Gertrude Wilson's *Social Group Work Practice* (1949), Harleigh B. Trecker's *Social Group Work* (1949), Grace Coyle's *Group Work with American Youth* (1948) and Gisela Konopka's *Therapeutic Group Work with Children* (1949) appeared in a time span of only two years. These books made the attempt to clarify the orderly process of social group work as part of the helping function of social work on the wide scale from healthy to sick individuals and groups.

During the decade of the 1960s the popularity of group services declined. The skills of group worker were then viewed as being more significant in the area of community organisation in organising youths and adults around important social concerns. Also during the 1960s the push towards a generic view of practice and the movement away from specialisations in casework, group work and community organisations, tended to weaken group specialisations in professional schools and to reduce the number of professionals who were trained in group work as their primary mode of practice.

During the 1970s interest in group work continued to wane. Fewer professional schools offered advanced course in group work and fewer practitioners used group work as a practice method. In order to increase practitioners awareness about the potential benefits of groups, group workers throughout the US and Canada came together and held the first Annual Symposium for the Advancement of Group Work in 1979. Each year since then, the annual symposium about group work has been convened.

Group work as a method of social work came to India in 1936 along with the introduction of professional social work education, ten years after its formal acknowledgement in the West. Even though there is evidence of the group approach being used in charity, imparting religious education through oral tradition, mobilising people for the freedom struggle against the British, social reform and in welfare strategies such as the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movement, there is very little documentation and theorisation based on it. All schools of social work in India teach a course/paper in social group work (sometimes alternatively titled as social work with groups) at the graduate and the postgraduate level.

There was an effort to develop some indigenous materials in group work by the then United Nations Social Welfare and Development Centre for Asia and the Pacific and the Association of Schools of Social Work in 1979. Compared to casework and community organisation, contributions in developing indigenous materials on group work are lagging even today. The Department of Social Work at the University of Baroda developed and published some of the first records of group work practice in 1960. The Association of Schools of Social Work jointly with the Technical Cooperative Mission (USA) laid down minimum standards for group work practice. Two social workers who have tried to trace the historical development of group work in India, V.D. Mehta (1987) and Helen Joseph (1997), agree that the theoretical perspective taught in the schools of social work in India and the practice models are primarily American as in the case of social work itself.

The practice of social group work in India is generally limited to correctional and other residential institutional setting, hospitals and so on in the urban areas. The general activities undertaken were recreational, educational and cultural in character. Group work method was also practiced in community work, as in the case of Mahila Mondals and Yuvak Mondals, but it was primarily recognised as community work. Practice of group work is also given emphasis through the fieldwork programme in some schools. Students placed in agencies and open communities work with groups of children, youth, adults and elderly who are either 'sick' or healthy in urban and rural areas. For instance, the student of Visva Bharati placed in open communities organise groups of children and adults in the poor neighbourhood with a combined objective of socialisation, structured recreation, functional literacy, awareness generation on health and

hygiene, environment and other socially relevant issues. In the recent years, groups of adolescent girls and boys are also been organised in the villages to deal with issues of life skill development including home management, reproductive and sexual health, sexuality, family planning methods etc., considering the social reality that majority of them will be getting married at an early age.

This brief review of historical trends in group work practice is intended to enable you to understand current trends in group work practice from a broad perspective. Today a remedial approach focussing on improving the functioning of individual group member continues as the preferred method of practice. This model of practice is based on problem identification, assessment, and treatment. The emphasis on mutual aid characteristics of group work also continues where the worker's role is to mediate between the needs of group members and society. Mutual aid and shared, reciprocal responsibility are appropriate in such settings such as short-stay homes and Nari Niketans that are designed to helping women in distress to live together, to support each other and to cope with distressing life events. It is also useful in community groups like mahila mondals, youth clubs and other community groups where reciprocal sharing of mutual concerns and the giving and receiving of support are central purposes. Professional social workers are also involved as consultants or facilitators of self-help groups that emphasise the mutual aid characteristics of a group.

Group Process

Small group process, the way groups' function, is an important content in group work. It is so because we need to know how small groups function, what are its key dynamics and how they can be made to function