

1-1-2001

The Social Group Work Tradition: Toward Social Justice a Free Society

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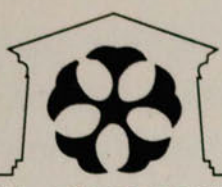
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Alissi, Albert S., "The Social Group Work Tradition: Toward Social Justice a Free Society" (2001). *Social Group Work Foundation Occasional Papers*. 1.

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THE SOcial Group Work Tradition:
Toward Social Justice in a Free Society

ALBERT S. ALISSI

Social Group Work Foundation Occasional Papers, First Series, Number 1

Albert Alissi is the president of the Social Group Work Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the promotion of traditional democratic social group work principles and practices. The Foundation seeks to foster the formation and leadership of small group clubs and associations in public and private non-profit agencies and institutions throughout our communities. A version of this paper was presented at the 22nd International Symposium on the Advancement of Social Work with Groups in Toronto, Canada, October 21, 2000 under the title, "Social Justice as an Enduring Element in our Mainstream Practice: The Social Group Work Tradition."

Social scientists call attention to the established fact that people are often blind to the obvious. Nothing evades our attention so much, they say, as that which we take for granted. This is especially true when it comes to traditions. Oddly enough, the more we try to understand our own social worlds, the more striking the impression is that what we find out is something everybody knew all along (Icheiser, 1970, p. 11). This may explain why most of the traditions associated with social group work existed before it was ever recognized or formulated.

My purpose here is to look back to those earlier historic periods at enduring traditions that underscore what is considered to be “mainstream” practice in social work with groups. I will highlight some traditional social group work practices and beliefs that reflect a long-standing commitment to working with vulnerable populations and dedication to pursuing social justice in society as a whole— a tradition of democracy, social goals, social action, and social change.

MAINSTREAM PRACTICE

Key discussions of mainstream practice originally appeared in seminal articles by Norma Lang (1979) and by Catherine Papell and Beulah Rothman (1980) which describe some of the common elements found in social work with groups, the more or less “central identity” that has come to be known as mainstream practice. So what are these common elements?

First, mainstream practice is democratic, as is evidenced in its commitment to individuals and environment, voluntary group associations, collective group deliberation and action, cultural pluralism, individual freedom and liberty, and social responsibility to promote the common good. Its reach

is inclusive in that it provides group experiences for diverse populations seeking diverse interests and goals. Moreover, it is a tradition where the people are seen and accepted as active participating partners in the group experience — they are, in short, *members* not *clients* or *patients*. And it's primarily the membership that generates power within the group.

Second, mainstream's simultaneous commitment to both the welfare of the individual and the betterment of society through the pursuit of social change and social action sets it apart from other group methods in the helping professions. Wilbur Newstetter (1948) made it clear that it was “only when we find the combined and balanced pursuit of both these objectives” (p.208) — meeting the personal needs and goals of the individual while also meeting specific social needs and goals within the larger environment — that we have what might be called social group work. It's what Konopka (1978) later spoke of as the two prongs of social work intent — “the emotional impact of group associations on the individual as well as the action-oriented input of the group on wider movements” (p. 124). On the one hand, the emphasis is placed on helping members internalize and incorporate the benefits of their group experiences within and beyond the group, and on the other hand, on facilitating the “collective power and action of the group to influence, modify, or contribute to its environment” (Rothman and Papell, 1980, p. 8).

Third, mainstream practice makes use of a variety of group activities that reflect the needs, interests and aspirations of the members. Activities are not seen as ends in themselves but rather as means for achieving mutually agreed upon goals. Programs are sensitive and responsive to members' spontaneous expression of interests and needs, but are carried out through collaboration and planning with members.

Fourth, mainstream practice puts its faith in the group and the power of small group processes: group formation (that is, arriving at common goals, determining membership and initial group structures), interaction and communication patterns, group development, formal and informal structures, communication patterns, group affect and emotional support, group deliberation, and group values and normative systems. The influences and benefits derived from small primary group relationships are favored where

members are accepted as total personalities (in and beyond the group), where groups have time to grow and develop and have a life history of their own, and where the group experience is a genuine reflection of natural group living. The quality of interaction is an authentic expression of the give and take within the group. Processes are typically unanticipated, evolutionary and cumulative — always reflective of the group's interests, needs and issues, but, never of the “people processing” type.

Finally, mainstream practice requires certain essential functions that are provided by a group worker, without which social group work as we understand it, can't take place. Consistent with its democratic foundation, the worker does *with* the group rather than *for* the group or *to* the group. Workers draw from a repertoire of roles sensitive to changing dynamics including enabler, facilitator, teacher, negotiator, group advisor — all of which are tailored to the needs and changing dynamics of the group. Working agreements are respected; authority and responsibilities are shared.

And so, democratic participation, the pursuit of social goals, the values associated with program content, the power inherent in group processes, and the influence of the group worker — all serve as a framework for highlighting traditional ideas and practices that endure in the mainstream thinking.

I will be looking at “social group work” which I take to be traditional or classic if you will. It's what old fashioned group workers mean when they talk about what group work was like prior to 1955 when the American Association of Group Workers (AAGW) joined the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Mainstream practice, although a contemporary term, has, as Norma Lang (1979) pointed out “ been enduring and pervasive” for more than half a century (p. 209). The concept, as I understand it, integrates social group work ideas and practices with the commonly shared ideas and practices that go to make up contemporary social work with groups.

Our review will focus on two broad historical periods that encompass: first, a period of **commitments and actions** —the era beginning in the late 1800's to the mid 1930's from the industrial revolution, through the progressive years, and WWI to the beginning of the depression, when most of the social group work traditions were taking root; and second, a period of **formulation,**

synthesis and expansion — the era from the mid 1930's to the mid 1950's, from the depression, through WWII, to the beginning of the Cold War, when social group work's conceptual and theoretical underpinnings were formulated and identification with social work formalized.

PERIOD OF COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS

First and foremost, the early volunteers and workers were activists whose primary interest was coping with the devastating impact the industrial revolution had in exploiting the human potential of so many people — the poor, the underprivileged, the newcomers, the vulnerable workers, the sick and disabled, and the elderly. Men and women volunteers, motivated mostly by religious and personal convictions, joined all kinds of causes to achieve social justice and promote the general welfare. Working out of the settlement houses, churches, missions, and a variety of youth and community service organizations, they were quick to respond to changing human needs. Endowed with a spirit of inquiry, experimentation and dedication to improve social conditions, these early pioneers believed in the power of the small self-governing group as the most natural vehicle to make participatory democracy work. Their sense of social justice was often expressed in terms such as “the common good,” “social goals,” and “betterment of society.” They did not think so much about theories but rather about dreadful living conditions, basic causes and possible solutions. Their vocabulary was filled with words like poverty, low wages, poor housing, political corruption, landlord exploitation, discrimination, sickness, and diseases (Wilson, 1976; Alissi, 1980).

Democratic Roots

Many social group work traditions can be traced back at least to the “clubbing institutions” that permeated 18th century London social life as described by Charles Booth in his monumental study of poverty. People who were left alone to deal with the social devastation turned naturally to each other, advancing what was perhaps one of the most functional of all social institutions of the time. This was evidenced in the tremendous growth of self-help clubs and associations of all kinds: social clubs, working men's clubs,

gentlemen's clubs, women's clubs, and mutual aid societies. A variety of benefits such as acceptance, companionship, thrifty savings plans, and health, accident, and death benefits were provided to members of these self-governing groups. Some early reformers, recognizing the constructive role working men's clubs played in the lives of the people, began organizing and promoting their development. Henry Solly (1904), the founder of the working men's social clubs, noted "that the 'greatest want' of working men, after a long day's toil was unrestrained social intercourse, the means of chatting with one another, with or without refreshments" (p. 23). Clubs were also seen as places where fellow workers, neighbors and citizens were made to feel "an interest in one another's well-being, and a desire to promote the common good" (p. 59). Many working men's clubs served as constructive alternatives to the public house so influential at the time, although some autonomous clubs were in fact closed proprietary groups with questionable reputations as places for gambling, betting and drinking.

Canon Barnett, founder of Toynbee Hall Settlement, established a working men's club in one of London's worst slums, which according to Pimlott (1935) was "remarkable because there were no conditions for membership and no facilities for drinking or for playing cards" (p. 14). At Toynbee, clubs were seen as places where neighbors and settlement residents came together to find warmth and, above all, friendship. It was largely through clubs that neighbors established closer ties and developed wider social outcomes (Reid, 1981; Schwartz, 1985/6). Toynbee clubs were also seen as just a part of a larger design. "No social reform," Canon Barnett (1919) insisted, "would be adequate which does not touch on social relationships, bind classes by friendships and pass, through the medium of friendship, the spirit which inspires righteousness and devotion" (p. 12). The Settlers believed that people who needed them, needed them to be close; they lived in the neighborhoods, and witnessed and experienced first hand what their neighbors were experiencing. Today's social workers might wonder about the boundary issues such close relationships posed for workers. Having worked and lived in a settlement house with my family in the 60's during the civil rights struggle, I can say that while there may have been boundary issues, they were

overshadowed when workers and neighbors came together as equal partners to deal with serious social issues. Neighbors always seemed to understand and accept the role of the settlement and its workers as advocates for social justice.

The clubbing institution had a major impact on the development of social settlements in the United States. The Neighborhood Guild, America's first settlement, was organized around clubs and group activities which "cultivate neighborly acquaintances" and build personal ties. Arthur Holden (1922) reported that the average settlement relied mostly on the "club system" to meet individual interests and needs of its neighbors. Clubs, unlike classes and other organized group activities, were closely knit, autonomous, self-governing associations with their own constitutions and elected members. Visitors to the settlement were often surprised when, for example, they witnessed a group of poor working class youths engaged in a free flowing passionate confrontational debate over the merits of socialism. Its significance was made clear by Lillian Wald (1915) in her assertion that:

An interest in basic social problems develops naturally out of the club relationship. Housing conditions, immigration, unemployment, minimum wage, political control, labor unions, are no longer remote and academic. They are subjects of immediate concern because of their vital importance to the new circle of friends. (pp. 181-182)

Social Goals

The approach the settlements used in working with vulnerable populations differed significantly from the philosophy of the Charity Organization Society. Whereas the COS stressed individual causation of poverty, the settlements, concerned more with the "poverty of opportunity" rather than the "poverty of clothes," blamed social economic conditions. Charity workers were inclined to characterize settlement work as being too sentimental, radical, unscientific, and vague in purpose. Settlement workers, on the other hand, sought to disassociate their work from charity in the minds

of the public. The emphasis they placed on reciprocal and mutual dependence of the social classes and pursuit of social justice set the stage for their acclaimed monumental efforts to bring about social reform.

The settlements' contribution to the cause of social justice was pervasive. In education, they initiated experiments in child care, kindergarten programs, vocational training, and school social centers. In recreation they established some of the first public playgrounds, recreation centers, fresh air and summer camp programs. Workers, such as Ellen Star, were active in the labor movement, joining picket lines, raising money, and making speeches in support of labor. Others, such as Florence Kelly, worked to eliminate child labor and unionize women. Settlements did much in the fields of housing reform, inter-cultural and interracial relations, immigration, health, sanitation, and political reform. Traditional differences in functions evolved between private and public agencies with the private agencies taking the lead in identifying needs and demonstrating program effectiveness, and the public agencies standing ready to adopt and make successful programs available to the wider public. This worked in so many cases: nursery schools and kindergartens, public baths, visiting nurses, vocational guidance and education, playgrounds, tuberculosis screening, well-baby clinics, and labor reforms (Hart, 1931; Davis, 1967).

The settlements' reputation as a stronghold for social reform was based largely on the social advocacy and activism of its most prominent leaders representing less than ten percent of the settlements in existence prior to WWI. Their advocacy, some scholars point out, was not aimed at using the "powerful group technologies that were developing within their agencies and elsewhere" (Wenocur and Resich, 1989, p. 142) to directly empower neighbors to engage in social action (Trolander, 1975). The vast majority of settlements were concerned, however, with the immediate needs of their vulnerable neighbors and they directed their energies at providing group services, informal education, socialization, and recreation services — services deemed to be indirectly related to social action. The early workers, it is important to note, assumed that the overall purpose of social action was to contribute to a socially awakened and socially intelligent body of citizens. It was seen as an educational

method that occurs within the actual experience of group participants and encourages a sense of social responsibility to the larger whole (Coyle, 1938, p. 2).

This period witnessed the phenomenal growth of private voluntary associations representing a variety of interests and causes, each in their own way aimed at promoting the general welfare or common good. The earliest club work was mostly with adults, but attention soon turned to children and youth. Prominent among the social agencies serving youth were the so-called "character building" agencies, the YMCA and YWCA, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Scouting, Camping, 4-H clubs, which, along with the settlements, community centers and religious organizations, became known as the traditional group work host agencies. Social group work flourished in these agencies and group work with children and youth became central to the group work theory building that occurred later in the formulation period.

Program Activities

Most of our traditional ways of looking at small group activities can be traced to progressive education, recreation and the play movement. John Dewey's (1939) philosophical and education theories that emphasized education for democratic living were particularly influential. Education for living in a democracy, he maintained, had to take into account the "total" person, including the social and emotional as well as the intellectual. This was not accomplished through routinized "rote" teaching methods but rather through active participation in social relationships where one "learns by doing." Unless education is tied to a larger democratic frame of reference, it will, he maintained, be "aimless and lacking in unified objective" (p. 25). The recreation movement did much to transform early negative attitudes about spontaneous use of free time to a much more positive recognition of the necessity of recreation in the well-being of the population. The recreation theory also stressed the social aspects in recreation — the mutual identification, feelings of "we-ness" and *esprit de corps*. Neva Boyd (1935), a former kindergarten worker, was the most prominent advocate of the play movement and was instrumental in urging group workers to recognize and cultivate the

social values derived from spontaneous play and recreational activities. The social significance of the play life of children, such as games, sports, arts and crafts, and other activities promoted by group workers were often expressed in terms of the “proper “ or “constructive” use of leisure time (Slavson, 1948).

Group Processes

The group worker’s understanding of group processes became more focused in light of the developing sociological theoretical developments around the turn of the century. Among these were Emile Durkheim’s (1951) emphasis on the reality of group phenomena, the distinction between “organic” and “mechanical” societies, and the social significance of attachments and belonging, alienation and isolation. William McDougall’s (1920) notion of the “group mind” although later rejected, called attention to the way mutual influences within groups contribute to the sense of togetherness and the wholeness of the group. Charles Horton Cooley’s (1909) concept of the “primary group” provided insights on how the small, cohesive, intimate, face-to-face groups such as the family, play group and neighborhood become powerful influences on individual socialization and personality development in the larger society. George Mead’s (1934) distinctions between the “I” and “me” parts of the self provided another framework for understanding individual and social development through group experiences. It wasn’t long before such terms as “structures,” “social processes,” “status and roles,” “acceptance-rejective patterns,” “stages of group development,” “social conflict,” and “social controls” entered the group worker’s vocabulary.

The significance of group process to social action and social change was perhaps best captured in a statement by Mary Follett (1920) which appeared in *The New State* affirming her strong belief that:

The group process contains the secret to collective life, it is the key to democracy, it is the master lesson for every individual to learn, it is our chief hope for the political, the social, the international life of the future. (p. 23)

Social Group Work Leadership

The concept of the group worker was in an early stage of development during this period. Often it was an older, more experienced volunteers who served as the settlement's representatives. They were often referred to as "directors," whose main function was to see to it that members had opportunities to take full advantage of the programs agencies had to offer. (Holden 1922). Attention focused on indigenous leadership as well as formal leadership. In their study of adult women's clubs, Woods and Kennedy (1922) noted that "the most successful clubs were those where the group leaders stayed in the background, throwing responsibility on officers and committees" (p. 137). Groups were active and program skills were considered to be among the most critical skills required of group leaders. The traditional view was that the successful leader "steeps himself in the activities, hopes, fears, dreams, and endless conversations of his charges, and is thus prepared to encourage each one in the several most vital aspects of his life" (p. 77).

By the end of this period, many social group work traditions had taken root. Yet, its true meaning was entangled with different ideological orientations, methods, functions, and fields of service. What remained to be done was to define, conceptualize and formulate its methodology. That started in earnest in 1935 when social group work was first recognized as a section in the National Conference on Social Work and finalized in 1955 when it became part of NASW.

THE PERIOD OF FORMULATION —1935-1955

The Great Depression hit the country head on and the economic damage was disastrous. By 1932, the average national income was half of what it had been in 1929. By 1934, one fourth of the civilian labor force was unemployed with approximately 20 million people receiving relief (Cohen, 1958, p. 161-162). The unprecedented growth in government services during the New Deal had a great impact on social work's philosophy and professional outlook. Group work agencies put aside their ideological differences and came together to address common problems. With increased staffing from public projects, they greatly expanded their recreation and informal education services

to meet the needs of unemployed youths and adults (Cohen, 1958).

With the threat of totalitarianism in the war years came a renewed interest in democratic philosophy and principles. It also hastened identification with social work, leading to more collaboration between social group workers and caseworkers, rapid developments in the use of group work for therapeutic purposes, work with involuntary groups, increased work with inter-cultural groups, more attention to professional issues and concerns, and more attention to knowledge building, especially from social and behavioral sciences.

The year 1935 was a landmark year in the development of social group work. Group work was recognized for the first time, when a group work section was established at the National Conference of Social Work. The next year, 1936, the American Association for the Study of Group Work (AASGW) was formed (Schneier, 1954). The number of educational institutions teaching group work by that time had grown to thirteen since 1923 when the first course was offered by Western Reserve University. That number almost doubled within two years after AASGW was formed. In 1946, AASGW members voted to become a professional organization changing its name to American Association of Group Workers (AAGW). The move towards professionalization prompted some of the early leaders who identified with group work's social action interests to withdraw from the organization to join other organizations such as the newly formed American Association for the Study of Community Organization (Wilson, 1976).

Group workers were engaged throughout this period in an on-going debate about whether social group work was a social movement, a field, a method, or process — which in the end boiled down to whether it was education, recreation, or social work. In 1939, AASGW established a bulletin entitled *The Group* with the significant sub-title, *In Education, Recreation, Social Work* (Trecker, 1955). Accordingly, group work was depicted in one of the early editions as a “nucleus but no boundaries” (Beckelman, 1939, p. 1). “Chic” Hendry (1940), Chairman of AAGW, capturing the spirit of uniqueness expressed by the members, made it clear that the “nucleus” of the group work idea had been discovered and was being explored. And, he added, it knows no boundaries — meaning that it is not a ‘crown colony,’ the preserve of any

special professional group, nor is it “a monopoly of any particular person, group, type of agency, or field” (p. 1). The “nucleus but no boundaries” idea, in today’s parlance, lends itself to additional interpretations that avoid the “either-or” traps we keep setting for ourselves: it’s not person *or* environment, but person *and* environment; it’s not micro *or* macro, but micro *and* macro; it’s not therapy *or* social action, but therapy *and* social action, and so on.

The Group was not an elaborate professional publication by today’s standard but it provided a common source of communication and identification, pulling group workers together around commonly shared beliefs about group work. One can’t read the articles in *The Group* without getting a sense of the spirit and enthusiasm group workers had for their developing craft. And when it was discontinued in 1955 with the creation of NASW, many of us who were members of AAGW felt that we not only lost our journal but also lost what we felt was a margin of uniqueness we shared as social group workers. Reflecting back on this more than two decades later, Konopka (Abels & Abels, 1978) felt compelled to say that although many of her hopes for social group work had been fulfilled, its affiliation with social work was probably a mistake. Social work’s historical authoritarian and bureaucratic roots, the profession’s desire for its practitioners to be in control, its fear of the power of members — all served, in her view, to deny full recognition to “something as revolutionary as social group work” (p. 115). Social group work, she suggested, needed to be part of many professions.

It would be hard to exaggerate the depth of feelings group workers had for their common and yet “unique” concept of social group work. Many of these group workers had strong ties with group work agencies which, although sharing common group work interests, had different missions and ideologies with long-standing traditions of their own. Many group workers in my generation (including me), for example, would tell you they “grew up” in one of the traditional youth service agencies and had themselves been club members, campers, camp counselors, as well as workers in these agencies. My first formal group work courses were taken in the late 40’s when I majored in what was at one time, Group Work and Community Organization (GWCO) and later changed to Youth and Community Leadership (YCL) at Springfield

College, one of the nation's two YMCA four-year training colleges. I worked in a Boys' Club and my main reason for going to college was to be a Boys' Club worker with a "college" degree. The school had no ties to social work but identified itself as a professional college which indeed had a long-standing tradition training physical educators, group workers and recreation workers who worked in public and private "group work" agencies throughout the country.

The progress made during this period to build on, conceptualize and formulate social group work from such diverse practice orientations is convincing evidence to me at least that "in diversity there is strength."

Democratic Practices

The social and political philosophies of Mary Parker Follett, Eduard Lindeman and Harrison Elliott had significant influences on how workers tried to apply the democratic ethic in their groups. Democracy, Follett pointed out in her book, *The New State* (1926), was not achieved through political parties or the ballot box but rather through active group participation and enlightened collective action. Lindeman placed a similar emphasis on citizen participation—participation that was essential because it not only contributed to individual and social development but also strengthened society. Elliot's book, *The Process of Group Thinking* (1928), helped reinforce the idea that it is through the give and take of individuals sharing ideas in the small group that creative growth and democratic solutions are best achieved.

Democratic group participation was a dominating theme in articles appearing in *The Group*. Slavson (1939) made it clear, for example, that "if group work is anything, it is practice in and preparation for democratic living" (p.2). William Killpatrick (1944) summarized AASGW's commitment to democratic methods in his statement appearing in *The Group* in 1944 which said:

Group work as this organization sees it, is a concrete expression of the spirit of democracy among the young: an organized group of equals decide, after consideration, upon

the goals of the group and upon the consequent means. Hardly any other organized activity is as educative: it taps strategic inner resources, it practices group processes, it leads naturally into surrounding social life. (p. 2)

Social Goals

Grace Coyle's Pugsley prize winning paper "Group Work and Social Change," presented at the National Conference of Social Work in Montreal in 1935, was a classic statement of social group work's perspective on social action. She believed that group workers are not only concerned about the growth and adjustments of group members, but also have a social responsibility for "the making of citizens." Group work, she maintained, is essential experience in collective living which is a powerful vehicle for social change. The countless number of young people who participate in youth-serving agencies were likened to an on-going school in collective living from which they will go on into "trade unions, the churches, the political parties, the pressure groups of all kinds" (Coyle, p. 145). Similar themes were echoed by others. Leroy Bowman (1935), for example, made it clear that "an integral, inescapable part of group work is to relate it to the social ends it is competent to help achieve" (p. 388). Joshua Lieberman (1938), while acknowledging that the responsibility for individual development and adjustment was shared by the home and other educational institutions, insisted that group work's main emphasis should be on training for social responsibility and citizen participation through voluntary purposeful group experiences. Nathaniel Cantor (1939) went further, arguing that all group work programs involved some kind of social action. He insisted in fact that "group work is social action" (p. 17).

There were, however, some concerns that these beliefs were based more on hope and aspirations than on reality. Ray Johns (of the YMCA program service staff) writing in the 1940 Conference Proceedings, pointed out for example how difficult it was to relate young people to social change in light of conservative community and agency financing and the lack of specific enterprises where young people could actually participate and contribute to

needed social change. It seemed to many that group work was moving away from its commitment to social justice and social change, emphasizing instead the individual growth and adjustment benefits derived from small group experiences.

Social group work's alliance with social work was judged overall to be a source of strength for both entities. Yet, it did present some "serious problems of integration" (Schwartz, 1959, p. 125) and group work's standing in the social work community remained ambiguous. This was aptly illustrated in a passage appearing in Frank Bruno and Louis Towley's history of the Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work published in 1957. Referring to social group work, it said:

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. Of all social work, social group work most commonly works with the least disadvantaged, at least to the extent that its clientele does not feel conspicuously deprived. It is possible that no social or economic class in a community is beyond profiting from what goes 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. (p. 422)

Program Activities

The use of program activities has been one of group work's trademarks as the emphasis placed on sound program planning and execution continued throughout the formulation years. Wilson and Ryland's (1948) influential group work text (affectionately known as the "Green Bible") devoted about a third of its pages to the use of different kinds of group activities. The content of program activities, Grace Coyle (1947) pointed out, was considered to be particularly significant in carrying out group work's commitments to social goals. Two kinds of activities were distinguished: first, those that advanced

cultural interests such as the arts, music, and drama that helped shape the values and social awareness essential to civilized life; and, second, those that engaged members in discussions and actions that directly addressed social questions and issues. There was no scarcity of maxims to keep group workers aware of these program goals. "The best program makes use of everyday life," workers said. Group workers were obliged always to "search for generalities" to identify social issues. The YMCA used the expression "Leading on" as a way to guide group discussion from the personal to national and even international "public affairs" (Limbert, 1941). Programs in Boys' Clubs were judged in terms of their "carry over value" (I still remember as a twelve year old being a member of the Boys' Club "victory volunteers" during WWII which was part of the training to be "A Citizen for Tomorrow"). The YWCA, building on its long standing "social education and action" program of anti-discrimination, chose to expand the horizons of its members in other ways, proclaiming the hope, in their 1946 National Convention that "rights may be secure, wrongs redressed, and the freedom of peoples defended without war" (Sims, p. 83).

Group Processes

Knowledge from the social and behavioral sciences about group processes continued to expand as research findings slowly filtered down to workers in the field. Lewin, Lippitt and White's (1939) famous study of small group leadership confirmed group workers' experiences. Group workers, however, rejected some of the value premises underlying applied research in the group dynamics field and traditionally preferred the term "group process" over the term "group dynamics." Fritz Redl's (1944) diagnostic work with groups and his study of group emotion and leadership and S. R. Slavson's (1945) permissive children's group activity therapy provided influential psychoanalytic insights from psychiatry. Jacob Moreno's (1934) pioneering work in sociometry was also influential as the "sociogram" and "near sociogram" entered the group worker's vocabulary. Much of the impetus for the scientific examination of small group processes came from initiatives by Wilbur Newstetter and Grace Coyle. The Wawokiye Camp Research Project

conducted by Newstetter and his associates was an extensive field study of natural groups of boys in a camp setting that provided detailed sociometric observations of group processes. Their book, *Group Adjustment: A Study in Experimental Sociology* (1938), provided one of the earliest frameworks for observing and dealing with group processes. About the same time, Coyle's sociological studies of similar group processes appeared in her influential book, *Social Process in Organized Groups* (1930). Its framework for identifying and influencing group processes was transformed into a detailed intensive study outline that came to be known as a "Group Analysis." The group analysis became the traditional assignment in Coyle's Group Work II class at Western Reserve University to teach students how to understand and influence group processes. I was just one of the many group work students who, after struggling with that group analysis, became hooked on group process. And, I might add, that same analysis, updated periodically, has been a required assignment in all Group Work II classes at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work for almost forty years now.

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of group process. Nat Cohen (1944) once remarked that group work was really a "nickname" for working the group process (p. 8). Group work, he said, begins when the worker works the group process. And not unexpectedly, group workers shared many tidbits of advice on how to work the group processes that were expressed in maxims such as: "The group is greater than the sum of its parts," "Trust the process," "Start where the group is at," "Don't do for the group what it can do for itself," "When in doubt, do nothing," "Leadership comes from within the group," and "No leader has more authority than the group allows."

Social Group Work Leadership

A Definition of the Function of the Group Worker that appeared in the 1949 issue of *The Group* was the first official definition developed by the AAGW. It was gleaned from statements describing the key characteristics of group work submitted by group workers in the field. Not surprisingly, it strongly reaffirmed traditional views about critical areas of practice: the dual focus on individual growth and desirable social goals; the dual focus on group

interaction and program activities; individual freedom and social responsibility; responsible citizenship; mutual understanding among cultural, religious, economic, and social groupings; opportunities for individuals to fulfill their capabilities; use of socially constructive group activities; interplay of personalities within the group and between the group and its surrounding community; and maintenance and constant improvement of our democratic society. Although perhaps lofty and idealistic, the statement was an accurate representation of what social group work leadership meant (Coyle, 1949).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Not all social group work traditions have endured, of course. I would like to conclude by commenting briefly on two of our lost traditions which I think have had a significant impact on our ability to engage in social action and affect social change. First was the abandonment of our traditional use of volunteers; second, the demise of the social group work host agency.

Daniel Thursz (1960) referred to social group work's reliance on voluntarism as "the Achilles Heal of Group Work," for it was clear that professional status could never be achieved if we group workers continued to rely on volunteers to carry out the core skills of our practice. Although this was so, it certainly didn't follow that voluntarism itself was any less significant. Without volunteers, Ed Lindeman asserted in an address given to the YWCA Volunteer Personnel Committee in 1952, professionals "would find themselves insulated from the true public and in touch with only that sector of the public which is represented by their constituents and clients. There would no longer be a life-line between their expertness and the experience of the people." He went on to say that "The health of a democratic society may be measured in terms of the quality of services rendered by citizens who act in 'obedience to the unenforceable' " (Schindler-Rainman and Lippitt, 1975, pp. i -ii).

The absence of group work host agencies has also had a major impact on our capacity to mobilize group work resources to engage in social action. Many group workers, at least in America, are now working in "non-social work host" agencies — in hospitals, clinics, mental health agencies, schools,

and court mandated treatment facilities — where policy decisions and agency practices and procedures are often determined by non-social workers and where the culture of the agency is far different from the traditional group work agency. Unlike their earlier counterparts, group workers today do not have ready access to the collective resources of their agencies to bring about social change in the pursuit of social justice. I often wonder how our practice might have been different if the theoretical underpinnings of Wilbur Newstetter's (1948) "intergroup work" concept had been more actively pursued during the formulation period.

I don't think it likely that much can be done to reverse this process, nor is it my aim to set forth any agenda other than to remind you about the cherished traditions that are ours to either use or squander. The best way to do that is to ask you to think about some of the questions I'm thinking about. The main question is—does all this talk about tradition make a difference?

From the standpoint of the traditionalist, we would ask: Is it old fashioned to be single-minded and perhaps redundant about our beliefs in democracy as we have portrayed them here? Is it old fashioned to talk about teaching kids how to be good citizens by being members of groups that practice good citizenship? Is it old fashioned to talk about civil society and the social responsibilities we have for one another? Is it old fashioned, in short, to honor our traditions?

And from the standpoint of the futurist, we have to ask: Who's to worry about how we preserve the integrity of the small voluntary group's place in a participatory democracy? Who's to worry about how group workers will manage to stay close to the people they work with? Who's to worry about how future workers learn the special skills needed to be a good group worker — one who works with people, not just "systems of all sizes"? For that matter, who's to worry that social group work isn't listed as such in the current issue of the Encyclopedia of Social Work?

Can it be that we are simply ignoring the obvious? I don't think so.

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This publication is the first of a series of occasional papers written by group work practitioners and advocates to be published and distributed by the Social Group Work Foundation. The Foundation invites group workers to join in its efforts to maintain the social group work traditions and values and insure that the lessons of the past are not forgotten.

