University of Dundee

Using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues

Berman-Rossi, Toby; Kelly, Timothy B.

Published in:
Growth and development through group work

Publication date:
2004

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):
Berman-Rossi, T., & Kelly, T. B. (2004). Using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues. In C. J. Carson, A. S. Fritz, E. Lewis, J. H. Ramey, & D. T. Sugiuchi (Eds.), *Growth and development through group work* (pp. 105-124). Haworth Press.

Using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues

Toby Berman-Rossi
and
Timothy B. Kelly
Barry University School of Social Work
tbermanrossi@mail.barry.edu or tkelly@mail.barry.edu

Using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues

Toby Berman-Rossi and Timothy B. Kelly
Barry University School of Social Work

Introduction to the subject

The matter of polarizing individual and social troubles has been a compelling and persistent part of our profession since its inception. We have often differed in our vision of our profession's mission and have been asked to choose either an individual or a social change emphasis (Reynolds, 1934; Schwartz, 1969/1994). Our early patterns of professional method jelled into casework, group work, and community organization and planning, with each holding forth its view of our professional purpose. Should we work case by case to provide personal and environmental assistance? Should the small group be the vehicle for assisting individuals with personal and environmental troubles? Or should it be the troubles themselves to which we direct our attention (Schwartz, 1985/86). Though schools of social work have moved away from these method divisions for Generalist and Foundation curricular, the vexing educational challenge of how to educate students to develop a professional vision which integrates both private troubles and public issues has persisted. Like most of us, we have been studying this matter for a while and believed it timely to examine how we go about this task and how well we think we do at it. Interestingly, we found some things we expected, learned new things about the challenge, and have generated some new ideas, all of which we will share with you.

Thesis

We believe that the teaching of private troubles:public issues should be integrated and infused throughout the curriculum, and not rarified. We believe this content is best set within the larger context of teaching students to find the connections between private troubles and public issues in all that they do whether they are working with individuals, families, groups, or

community. However, it is also our belief, and thesis, that the teaching of group work is the ideal content to help students learn to see the connection between private troubles:public issues. Our thesis does not imply that group work bear the sole burden of teaching the content, as that would further dichotomize the concept. Rather, in an integrated methods sequence group work can place a special and unique emphasis on private troubles:public issues. The foundation for understanding the connection can be laid when teaching practice with individuals and families, but a fuller understanding can occur through the teaching of group work practice. Understandably beginning students are very taken by the pain of individual persons and families. The recognition of this private pain allows us to introduce the idea that for all private pain there are public issues that bear on and help create the private pain, and this will "prime the pump," serving as a foundation for helping students to clearly see the connection.

Having set up the individual and family connection, we can more fully and clearly develop the connection using group work content. When working with individual persons or families, the *individual* problems, which are always a case in point of a larger public issue, take precedence in the minds of students. For example, when an individual client is sitting in front of social work student discussing her difficulties making her welfare to work appointments, the *individual* pain, obstacles, or "resistance" of the client are so powerful that the student will understandably have a difficult time in recognizing the public issues of poor public transportation or lack of childcare. However, if a group of women begins to discuss the infrequent and unreliable bus system or lack of appropriate childcare as constant obstacles to fulfilling their welfare to work requirements, the public nature of the women's private troubles is much more palpable for the student.

In essence, it is easier to see the public issues side of private troubles when working with groups. The collective nature of groups gives rise to shared problems of concern and it becomes easier to "add up" the individual problems and see a bigger picture. Additionally, the power of the common ground in groups and the strengths in numbers dynamic can be used to help students more clearly see the connection between the public and the private, as well as the importance of people acting in their own behalves. Keeping in mind the educational principle of moving from less complex to more complex, group work has a special place in curricula for helping students master the private troubles:public issues connection. As students begin to see the public issues in their work with groups they can be pressed to more readily make connections in their work with individuals.

Our approach in this paper will be to describe the points along the curricular stream of a generic practice sequence that provide optimal teaching moments for conveying private troubles and public issues using common group work content. To this end we will present teaching tools and strategies that can be incorporated into practice curricula that make the connection explicit and will help students to integrate this important concept into their understanding of client problems and work. Three overriding principles guide us in our work. First, we must "…merge individual and social need into a single image" (Schwartz 1969/1994, p. 389). Second we need to define and teach the skills of converting private troubles into public issues and private issues into public troubles, thereby showing the connections between. And finally, we must teach the practice skills for working with private troubles and public issues, in groups.

Issues and challenges for teaching and learning

We believe there are four areas to which we must address ourselves. Each of these areas offers distinctive challenges for teaching and learning which, in turn, contribute to a strategy for

teaching the connections between private troubles and public issues and necessary content. We offer what we believe are predominant rather than exclusive patterns. These are a set of generalizations. They will not apply to all situations, all the time, but they seem to capture our experience in our community and we hope our observations have captured some truths that we all share in common. We have not attempted to be exhaustive in our notations, rather to identify those aspects we consider most salient.

These four areas of examination include: students, the subject matter itself of using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues, the profession, and the social agency.

Students

This involves the whole arena of who our students are, what they bring to the social work classroom and to the helping experience, and what these mean for the content. We see in our students:

- The propensity to individualize and to believe in individual responsibility for individual troubles and therein an incorporation of society's dominant individualistic and deficit orientation;

- The propensity to psychologize and to offer primarily psychological explanations for behavior and social ills, reflecting society's primary explanatory mode;

- Lack of experience with social movements and distance from social cause;

- Greater professional interest in individual change than environmental change;

- Perceiving greater potency in individual rather than environmental change;

- An incorporation of the profession's dominant value system of granting higher status to working on private troubles rather than public issues;

- Preference for working with clients individually;

- An initial hesitancy towards working with groups:

  - groups are too complex;

  - too much to figure out;

  - increased uncertainty with what to do;

  - fear of not being able to hear and attend to so much simultaneously;

  - the desire to limit complexity;

  - favoring the individual as a means of limiting complexity and increasing a sense of accomplishment and competence;

  - favoring the individual as a reflection of what is familiar;

  - psychologizing and individualizing within the group decreases seeing the connection between private troubles and public issues;

  - limited seeing of the collective, the group as a whole.

The profession

- Dualistic thinking within the profession: work with individuals **or** with groups, **or** within the community;

- Our historic failure to see the generic elements in practice decreases our ability to see the connections between private troubles and public issues. As Lee (1985/1986) notes, this failure limits our ability to see the profession whole and people's lives whole;

- The dualism inherent within the notion of person and environment rather than the idea of person in environment

- The separation of internal and external sources of oppression without finding the connections between the two;

- A predominant paradigm of more highly valuing individual and psychological practice;

- Systems of rewards in the profession, e.g.; hierarchies of value in professional associations;

- Professional associations and licensure laws which further a separation of private troubles and public issues;

- The very invention of the concept of clinical practice, its inherent narrow definition, and our need to expend personal and environmental resources in defense of our beliefs.

Group work itself

- Debate among us concerning the major purpose of group work. We too discuss whether group work's purpose is individual change? Social change? Or some combination of the two;

- These debates are shown in our frequent characterizing of distinctive group types, e.g., therapy groups on one end and social action groups on the othe;.

- The separation into dichotomous group types means that groups typed as more individually focused or termed therapy will have greater difficulty seeing and addressing the public issues and those termed social action will have increased difficulty seeing and addressing the private troubles, e.g., a depression group for women; a housing group focused on improving housing;

- Third party funding for groups which focus on personal change thus compromising work on the public issues;

- Short-term nature of groups, which focuses on immediate personal change, decreases the possibility of working on private troubles and public issues.

The agency setting

- Within **our** community in South Florida, the prevailing world view of clients' troubles is individualistic, psychological, and deficit-oriented;

- This prevailing world view helps shape students' views and induces individualistic, psychological, and deficit-oriented conceptions of service offerings and client need;

- The use of third party payers of services based in the DSM-IV reaffirms this orientation;

- Applied to group work service offerings we see the following in our community agencies:

  - Group work services which are frequently short-term in nature, e.g., six to ten weeks is supposed to fix all;

  - Dichotomous group types, e.g., task **or** therapy **or** social action which by definition ruptures the connections between private troubles and public issues;

  - The dichotomizing of expressive and instrumental aspects of groups which further ruptures the connections between private troubles and public issues, e.g., a student saying "this is a therapy group. We don't bring speakers in here;"

  - Groups very much focused on individual change and very focused away from the public issues which are integral to each of these groups, e.g., anger-management groups, self-esteem groups, parenting- skills groups, women's depression groups;

  - A concentration of authority in the worker to direct change in fast-paced, short-term, individually-oriented groups, which decrease partnership and increase the muting of clients' voices particularly concerning the public issues which bear on the private troubles.

The subject matter of using groups to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues:

And finally we want to say that our subject itself is very complex and requires considerable effort to break the content down, organize it, infuse it, and make it manageable and usable to students.

CONTENT

The challenges just identified help shape the infusion of content on private troubles:public issues into the group work content we ordinarily teach in the Foundation and Generalist curricula. Though schools place varying emphasis on group work in their curricula and there is not uniformity about the "what" or "how" of teaching group work, there are certain group work topics and content that can be easily incorporated into most curricula that will help teach the connection between private troubles and public issues. These content areas are placed within the context of the phases of the helping process: history of the professional method, understanding the agency/community context, beginning phase, middles or work phase, and the ending phase.

History of Professional Method

Teaching about the history of professional method immediately introduces students to the profession's struggle with private troubles and public issues. This content provides an ideal opportunity to teach how the profession has struggled with the connection between private troubles and public issues. Though often overstated, the difference in approaches between the settlement house movement, with its social justice, environmental change, and small group emphases, and the charity organization society movement, with its individual case-by-case emphasis, highlights the competing streams of influence within the profession. This discussion can begin to socialize students to the importance of seeing the connection.

Teaching Tool: Why you want to be a social worker

- Introduces historic helping traditions;

- Introduces private troubles public issues;

- Identifies devaluing of group work and allows the introduction of the power of groups.

Teaching Tool: History of Professional Method Lecture

- Introduces the past struggles of the profession and shows how they are still evident in today's world of practice;

- Begins to socialize students into the person in environment perspective.

Agency Community Context

As we teach about agency and community context we must help students see how some agencies focus on only the private troubles and overlook public issues side of problems in their definition of service. We must help expand students' problem definitions. In addition, they must learn how issues of managed care and funding limit their attention to both sides of the equation. Likewise, helping students to understand that community services are nested in community can allow students to see the public nature of problems. Societal values and beliefs about potential members and their problems and questions about societal barriers impacting potential members should be addressed. In dealing with these issues teachers can explicitly point out the connection and the influence on the service being offered and on the lives of the members.

Teaching Tool: *Agency Fair*
- Illustrates the agency influence on problem definition;

- Demonstrates that problem definition influences and may limit helping actions;

- Illustrates problem of dichotomizing public issues private troubles.

Beginnings

In the unit on beginnings we infuse private troubles:public issues content in the following areas: tuning-in, contracting, group planning, assessment.

Tuning-In

In teaching students to tune-in to the feelings and concerns members may have about a group service teachers can guide them to imagine not only the personal feelings and concerns, but also the concerns and feelings that emanate from the associated public issues. They must be taught to tune-in to both the private troubles and public issues and to increase their awareness of the relation between the two.

Contracting

Contracting with groups is an important group work skill. It involves a definition of the group purpose, worker roles, member roles, and process for work. Including Lee's (2001,) notion of empowerment as a necessary part of the contracting process provides a segue into private troubles and public issues. Contracting should, at the least, allow for the understanding of the public influence on the troubles bringing members to the group. For example, students could learn to ask, "How did you get this way? What outside yourself contributed to having this particular problem?"

Teaching Tool: *Contracting Lecture*

- Teach reaching for common ground;

- Ability to see and voice multiple themes;

- Teach how to reach for public influence on members' private troubles and translate into working agreement.

Teaching Tool: *Group Contracting Process Recording*
- Teaches the search for commonality;

- Public policy issues concerning foster children are inherent in boy's discussion. Able to point to the connection.

<u>Group Planning</u>

Group planning provides ample opportunities to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues. Two typical planning areas are especially rife with opportunity. These are group purpose and member need.

Teaching about the importance of a clear group purpose is fret with challenges and opportunities in teaching about private troubles:public issues. Quite often group purpose is defined along instrumental, expressive, or psychoeducational lines. Students must be taught that private troubles and public issues are inherent in all groups, but that the potential to address both is often limited by dichotomous definitions of group purpose and type. There must be room in "therapy" groups for the inherent public issues. Likewise there must be room in instrumental or task groups to work on the associated private troubles. To proceed else wise is to deny the reality of human experience.

The idea of forming a group around the identification of unmet need provides a window of opportunity to infuse private troubles:public issues content into the teaching. Too often students try to form groups without a clear recognition of a felt need among a group of people. Helping students to identify a common felt need and the internal and external influences on that need will point to the connection between public and private issues.

Teaching Tool: *Group Planning Exercise*

- When teaching agency and community context we must teach how some agencies focus on only the private troubles and overlook the public issues side of problems in their definition of service, thus expanding students' problem definitions;

- Students must be taught that private troubles and public issues are inherent in all groups, but that the potential to address both is often limited by dichotomous definitions of group purpose and type;

- Helping students to identify a common felt need and the internal and external influences on that need will point to the connection between public and private.

Assessment

Assessment and its place in social work practice has been one of the defining features of many of the professional battles in which social work educators and practitioners have engaged. Regardless of the particular "school" to which one ascribes, assessment requires the "…the collection of relevant information, its systematic organization, and the analysis and synthesis of the data" (Germain &Gitterman, 1996, p. 101). When teaching students to assess the members of their groups and the group as a whole, teachers should construct questions and assignments that also include inquiry into the social and political context of the helping encounter and problems addressed. In addition, students must learn to assess the extent to which public issues bears on the private troubles of the group and its members and their ability to work on public issues.

Teaching Tool: *Stages of Group Development Lecture*

- Students are taught to assess the group's stage of development and how private troubles and public issues affect that development;

- As the group develops the group as a whole influences individual behavior thus strengthening the members' abilities to work on the private:public issues;

- On a smaller scale, students can see how members' private troubles in group are connected to the public issues nature of the group as a whole.

Teaching Tool: Assessment Diagram

- Teach students to assess the impact of multiple influences on member problems as well as group processes.

Teaching Tool: Assessment Questions

- For each private trouble identify the public issues to which it is connected;

- For each private trouble, identify internal and external sources of oppression and elaborate upon the connection between the two

Middle or Work Phase

After teaching students the skills of beginnings, our curriculum moves to the work phase of helping individuals, families, and groups. Regardless of how a school organizes its curriculum, teachers should look for the specific ways to include content on private troubles:public issues that are inherent in their curricular organization. In our school we have realized that each problem domain we address in the work phase offers unique opportunities to highlight the connection between private troubles and public issues. The connection does not have to be a major topic of instruction, but can easily be integrated into the lessons taught. We offer our insights as an example.

Point of Entry

Students must learn to see that the initial definition of work with a group serves as a point of entry. From the initial point of entry the group can decide to move into other spheres of work. In our curriculum we teach students to help with what Germain and Gitterman (1996) define as problems in living. These definitions serve as the conceptual basis for framing a point of entry and include interpersonal stressors, environmental obstacles, and life transitions. Groups may begin working on a life transition, for example, moving from welfare to work, but realize a

public issue may be presenting an environmental obstacle to successfully navigating the life transition. Students must be taught to help the group shift into the associated area of work.

Teaching Tool: *Group for mothers in a halfway house*

- Demonstrates how a worker can move from working on life transitions, the initial point of entry, to public issues.

Problem Domains

When helping students learn how to help group members with interpersonal stressors that occur within groups a simple question about the environmental influences on the interpersonal stressor can beautifully illustrate the influence of public issues on what is occurring within their groups. A case in point involves one student who described a maladaptive pattern of communication she noticed in her group. She described a pattern of resistance to considering leisure skills training for a group of adolescent boys who were in trouble in school. She kept pressing the boys to consider alternative leisure activities, and the more she pushed the more they ignored or laughed at her. When she was asked to examine what community, societal, or political forces may be impacting this power struggle among the members and herself she realized that the boys lived in a very poor area with no recreational services at all. Sharing this realization with the boys at the next meeting promoted the group's work on the many impinging public issues in their lives.

Another problem domain in which we teach group work skills is environmental obstacles. This problem area is rich with opportunities to teach the connection between private troubles and public issues. Quite often students psychologize problems that are inherently environmental. Helping students understand the problems as environmental, and then helping them to find ways

for their groups to work on the environmental obstacle go a long way towards teaching the importance of understanding the nature of private troubles:public issues.

Teaching Tool: Process Recording from Floor Group in Nursing Home

- Highlights students' propensity to psychologize;

- Demonstrates the public issues/private trouble connection.

Teaching Tool: Environmental Obstacle Lecture

- Environmental obstacles always have a public issues component;

- Students must be taught to see the connections, but also be able to work on the emotional component as they work on environmental obstacles.

Finally, in teaching students to help groups work on stressors resulting from life transitions we look for ways to teach the connection. This is best done by asking students to assess the strengths and limitations in the group members' environments.

ENDINGS

The final unit in the integrated practice sequence concerns endings and termination. We infuse private troubles:public issues in this unit in several ways. For example when teaching students to help the members identify future work that might be done after the group ends, we discuss how work on public issues could be a part of what is identified. Additionally, when short term individually focused groups terminate students are asked to think about how these groups could be transformed into groups that begin working on public issues.

CONCLUSION

The false dichotomy between public issues and private troubles is deeply ingrained within our society, and there are numerous forces that work to obscure the connections between private pain and social influences. To counter these pervasive forces social work educators must constantly find teaching moments to assist students to see the important connections. Though the infusion should occur throughout the social work curriculum, group work offers an ideal and parsimonious medium for teaching the content. By outlining many of the challenges to teaching the connection between private troubles and public issues and then offering some teaching strategies and tools we hope to foster discussion and new study about how to better infuse the content. Who better to undertake this task than group work?

TEACHING TOOLS

Teaching Tool	Teaching Concepts and Content
Why you want to be a social worker exercise	• Introduces historic helping traditions • Introduces private troubles public issues • Identifies devaluing of group work and allows the introduction of the power of groups
Historic Traditions Lecture	• Introduces the past struggles of the profession and shows how they are still evident in today's world of practice • Begins to socialize students into the person in environment perspective
Agency Fair	• Illustrates the agency influence on problem definition. • Demonstrates that problem definition influences and may limit helping actions • Illustrates problem of dichotomizing public issues/private troubles
Tuning In Exercises	• Increases consciousness of private troubles:public issues • Teaches how to tune into both private and public • Teaches internalized oppression
Contracting	• Teaches reaching for common ground • Teaches ability to see and voice multiple themes • Teaches how to reach for public influence on members private troubles and translate into working agreement
Group Planning Exercise	• Teaches students to see how some agencies focus on only the private troubles and overlook the public issues side of problems in their definition of service, thus expanding students' problem definitions • Teaches that private troubles and public issues are inherent in all groups, but that the potential to address both is often limited by dichotomous definitions of group purpose and type. • Identify a common felt need and the internal and external influences on that need will point to the connection between public and private.
Assessment Handout	Assess the extent to which public issues bears on the private troubles of the group and the ability of the group to work on the public issue.
Assessment question	• For each private trouble identify the public issues to which it is connected
Assessment question	• For each private trouble, identify internal and external sources of oppression and elaborate upon the connection between the two.

Dysfunctional Interpersonal Stressor assignment	• Environmental stressors often impact interpersonal stressors
Environmental Obstacles Assignment	• Environmental obstacles always have a public issues component. Students must be taught to see the connections, but also be able to work on the emotional component of the environmental obstacles
Life Transitions Assignment	• Teaches students to assess the strengths and limitations in the members' environments and their impact on members' private troubles.
Process recording from Floor Group in Nursing Home	• Highlights students propensity to psychologize • Demonstrates the public issues/private trouble connection
Group Contracting Process recording	• Teaches the search for commonality • Teaches the connection between the private troubles of the foster children and the public policy affecting their lives..
Group for mothers in a half-way house case	• Demonstrates how a worker can move from working on life transitions to public issues
Stages of Group Development Lecture	• Demonstrates that as a group develops, the group as a whole influences individual member behavior. On a smaller scale, students can see how members' private troubles in group are connected to the public issues nature of the group as a whole
Scapegoating Lecture	• Internalization of oppression

PURPOSE: **The objectives of this exercise are to: help students develop increased consciousness regarding their motivation for social work and whether they place their preference for individual or social change or a combination of the two; to provide a segue to the history of professional method and to introduce some of our major professional debates around professional purpose.**

Infused private troubles:public issues content is highlighted below.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE A SOCIAL WORKER?

I have a hunch I'd like to begin testing out today....I bet our early history of professional method, our early ways of helping lie within your aspirations for yourself and the profession.

Why did you choose social work? **Most students identify their desire to assist with individual change as their primary motivation.**

What is your vision of social work? **Ascertaining students' vision helps shape our presentation of the profession's charge between private troubles and public issues.**

Meet in groups of five and discuss the two questions. Have a note taker and then we will compare notes.

Put answers on board and group them according to private troubles or public issues/ social justice and social change or deficit focused or individual change or somewhere between in a person:environment configuration.

As we think together about your answers to the questions (your vision and why social work), about historical traditions, and soon about your own agencies - we will be thinking about four major questions:

1. What view of social work is projected?

2. How is society viewed?

3. How are clients and their problems in living viewed?

4.   What is the view of the helping process? What is done to help?

Working with the students' productions allows us to shape our discussion of the mission of the profession between private troubles and public issues.

AGENCY EXERCISE: SOCIAL SERVICE INTAKE INTERVIEW

Purpose: The objectives of this assignment are to illustrate agency influence on problem definition and how problem definition may influence and/or limit helping actions. Additionally, the problem of dichotomizing public issues and private troubles is illustrated.

The Client and the Client's story are as follows:

Ms. Ramirez, a 38 year old, Cuban-American, single mother has become very worried about her 8-year-old son Julio. Since Hurricane Andrew Julio has become increasingly non-communicative. In addition, Ms. Ramirez is quite concerned that Julio has begun to frequently wet the bed at night. Ms. Ramirez has two other children, a girl age 15 and boy age 12. Prior to the hurricane six months ago all three children lived with Ms. Ramirez and Ms. Ramirez's mother in the family home. Since the home was destroyed by the hurricane the family has been divided and are living separately. Ms. Ramirez and Julio are living together in the home of a friend. The 15-year-old daughter is living with a school friend and her family across town, while Ms. Ramirez's mother has taken her 12-year-old grandson to stay with a relative out of state.

1.   Department of Children and Family (DCF)

Ms. Ramirez and Julio were sent to your agency after Julio's teacher submitted several

complaints to the school counselor about Julio. The teacher's complaints focused on her

concerns about Julio's seemingly sudden and extremely withdrawn behavior, his minimal

communication, and her knowledge regarding his current living arrangements. After the school

counselor could not reach Ms. Ramirez on two occasions regarding this matter she contacted

DCF.

2.   Big Brother/Big Sisters Association

Ms. Ramirez has grown increasingly concerned about the changes in her son's behavior and her

inability to reach him. When she received a flyer in the mailbox describing the services offered

by the Big Brother/Big Sisters Association she decided to contact them regarding Julio.

3.   Hospital Emergency Room

Having no source of either private or public medical insurance Ms. Ramirez felt she had no

choice but to take Julio to a hospital to seek the advise of a physician. After being interviewed

by the emergency room nurse Ms. Ramirez and Julio were referred to the emergency room social

worker.

4.   Community Mental Health Center

Ms. Ramirez recently shared her concerns about Julio with the friend with whom they are currently living. Her friend told her about a Community Mental Health Center in the neighborhood and suggested Ms. Rameriz go to the center and see if they might be able to help.

5.   After School Program at local neighborhood community center

One of Ms. Ramirez's co-workers told her about an after school program at the local neighborhood community center. The co-worker said that the activities and programs at the community center really kept her son entertained and helped him to make friends. Ms. Ramirez decided to go to the center and see if they could offer anything for her son.

AGENCIES:

- Must tune-in to the specific philosophy, structure and services supported by your agency.

- Must figure out what you can offer Ms. Ramirez and/or her son **based on the agency definition of service** and the agency mandate.

- Must prepare to have a conversation with Ms. Ramirez.

MS. RAMIREZ AND JULIO:

- Ms. Ramirez think about what your concerns are regarding Julio and think about what kind of assistance you feel he might need.

- Julio needs to think about what he may be feeling and experiencing at this point in his life and how he feels about his Mother seeking the assistance of an agency.

- Think about what you want to ask of an agency.

Ms. Ramirez and Julio will make their way to each agency and we will take turns looking in on the first portion of an intake interview between agency and client.

After role playing occurs lead the class in a discussion about the various helping activities proposed by the various agencies. Highlight the similarities and major differences.

PURPOSE: This contracting record is introduced to teach the skills of tuning-in and contracting. The tuning in exercise could be used to tune in to both the private troubles and the public issues inherent in this group. The first two sessions falter because the worker is too embarrassed to engage the potential members in discussion of their private troubles and the obvious public issues which bear on their lives. Without a common ground there is no hope of working on any issues for which the group was proffered.

Having tuned-into the client need (both the private troubles and the public issues), and a service offer conceptualized, the record can be used to critique and redo the practice emphasizing the connection between private troubles and public issues. In this instance, both agency based and societally based public issues have great significance for these boys' lives.

Foster Care Group*

Initial Phase

The following excerpts from the first three meetings of a group for adolescent boys in foster care, the worker makes three separate attempts to make a statement that will help the boys begin doing what they came to do.

FIRST MEETING:

I then stated that they had <u>common interests and concerns like most teenage boys</u>, *(mutuality*)* and said that their presence would give them an opportunity to discuss these concerns. I emphasized the fact that it was their group and it would, therefore, be their decision as what they wanted to talk about. B. entered, sat down without taking his coat off....<u>I asked if there were any questions that they wanted to ask. Each of them said no.</u> *(Reaching for feedback)*

After a long period of silence, I asked if they were in favor of attending the meeting when they first heard about it....Y. said that he wasn't....F. Said he didn't mind coming.....<u>I asked if they would like to talk about girls and there was a long period of silence.....</u>*(deflection*)

<u>SECOND MEETING:</u>

The boys engaged themselves in a discussion about camp. I joined them.... Y. came into the room very smartly dressed and wearing large sunglasses....they all started laughing...I greeted Y. and introduced him to T.   I then stated that I was sure T. would probably like to know the <u>purpose of the group,</u> *(what was the purpose)* since it was his first attendance. I wondered if someone would like to tell him about the purpose of the group. M. said he would give it a try.....He began by stating that, as he saw it, this was their group; they talked about what they were interested in and added, pointing at me, <u>that I was only there to supervise the meeting</u> *(worker role unclear)..*There was a brief period of silence which was broken by M. who re-introduced the subject of camp.

<u>THIRD MEETING:</u>

T. asked me if I had ever gone on the Cyclone. M. responded to his question by saying that he had gone on the ride and enjoyed it.....I interrupted him and asked if they could hold the discussion until we informed L. what the group was all about......(after they follow the pattern of "telling each other") <u>I stated that I was a social worker with the Department of Welfare but I would not be visiting their homes or schools because they had their own social workers for that purpose. I also mentioned that all the boys in the group are foster children and that their</u>

<u>concerns and problems are quite common.</u>   *(Defining role and purpose)* I paused and there was silence. I said "<u>How about it, are you concerned about your own parents, foster parents and about who your are and where you come from</u>". *(Partializing and reaching for feedback)* M. started to speak, then stopped. I encouraged him to continue, telling him that I knew it wasn't easy to talk about such matters. M. said , "About your own parents, the only thing that bothers me is that they tell you about them.....I asked M. what he meant. He said; "After you live in a foster home from a baby and think that you are living with your own parents, your social worker comes by one day and tells you that the people you are living with are not your real parents." To show him I understood how he felt, I replied that it is a rough deal and asked if the others felt the same way. F. said he always knew he was a foster child and knows the reason. M. said he know he was a foster care too. F. wanted to know why M. was a foster child, and said that he didn't have to answer if it were too personal. M. said he didn't mind telling the group. He then asked me if I had ever been downtown near W's department store. I said that I had been in the area a couple of times. He asked P. the same questions and P. said yes. M. continued: "well there is a man who sells pretzels in front of the store all year round." He hesitated, smiled and said, "He's my real father." Though M. smiled as he informed us of this, there were no smiles from the other boys.....(M. Continues to tell his story, the others listen, exchange observations, then move into a discussion of fathers drinking, what drinking means to them, etc...)

*From: Schwartz, W. (1968). <u>Group work in public welfare</u>. (pp. 21-22).Chicago: American Public Welfare Association. Italicized content not in original, added for lectures Underlines not in original, added to highlight worker action.

PURPOSE: This generic pre-group planning exercise is designed to increase students' skills in planning groups.

Infused private troubles:public issues content is integrated below.

Pre-Group Planning Exercise

1) Move into Beginnings with Groups Unit

   a) Pre-Group Planning – Have class break up into groups of 4 or 5 students and brainstorm and compile a list of everything a worker should think about, make decisions about, and do between conceiving of an idea for a group and actually holding the first meeting. After they brainstorm ask for one item on their lists (go around the room until the answers are exhausted) and ask they give their items put them into columns on the board according to:

   i) Need – what wants drives, problems, issues, or areas of concern exist among those in the target population. **Identify both the private troubles and the public issues. Is there a visible and sufficient common ground among the members and between the private troubles:public issues?**

   ii) Purpose – what are the hopes, expectations, and objectives will each member has about participation. What are the ends and objectives the group will collectively pursue? **How has the group been characterized? To what extent are private troubles and public issues incorporated? Are they joined or dichotomized?**

iii) Composition – Number and characteristics of members and workers. **Does group composition foster connections and a strong common ground or does it represent an obstacle to members seeing connections among them and between the private troubles:public issues?**

iv) Structure – what arrangements need to be made to facilitate the work(especially time and place). **How will time, length of group, open or close-ended nature affect work on private troubles and public issues?**

v) Content – What are the means to achieve the purpose? What will be done; how will it be done, and why?

vi) Pre-group contact – how will you get members and how will they be prepared? **To what extent are private troubles and pubic issues identified?**

vii) Agency context – How will agency policy, mandate, mission impact group? **In particular, how does the agency's context influence the creation of the group?**

viii) Social context – What larger social and political forces may impact the offering of a group service? **What are some of the public issues which bear on delivering the service of this group?**

b) Now use Kurland and Salmon's pre-group planning model in small groups. Each group should take one of the following scenarios and plan according to the above items. After you work on this (for about 45 minutes) you will present your plan to the class.

i) Several members of a senior center have recently had an adult child die. Social workers there believe that a group might be useful.

ii) Recently, several HIV-positive mothers with young children have begun to use the services of an AIDS information and treatment agency. Workers there believe that a group with a focus on parenting issues might be useful.

iii) Several participants in a community-based agency serving youth have parents with AIDS. Workers there believe that a group for these youngsters could be helpful.

iv) Several seventh graders who are new to a junior high school appear to be lonely, scared, and unable to make friends. The workers believe that a group might be useful.

v) An increasing number of young adults being treated in a public mental health agency are there because of court mandated attendance for alcohol and drug offenses. Workers there believe that a group might be useful.

To infuse content we can: 1) deductively ask students to be attentive to both private troubles and public issues, 2) inductively we can see how they develop their groups and then work with what they develop re: private troubles and public issues, or 3) we can develop a combination of the two.

Original content from Kurland, R. & Salmon, R. (1998). Teaching a methods course in social work with groups (pp. 24-27). Alexandria, VA: CSWE.

LECTURE ON HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL METHOD

PURPOSE: This content helps introduce students to the profession by highlighting historical roots of professional method. The history introduces students to the profession's struggle integrating private troubles and public issues and provides the opportunity to emphasize the importance of seeing the connection between them.

Casework	Group Work
Middle and Upper Class	Generally middle class, though some upper class
Religious, moralistic and often paternalistic. Charity workers believed they knew better how to live. Their station in life was proof of this.	Very eclectic group – social reformers/socialist who became concerned with chaos in the social order. There was also a sense of superiority, but it was different because blame for people's problems in living was, for the most part, placed in the social environment -–and placed at the hands of the exploiters.
Concerned with the individual and his/her rehabilitation. Mercy more than justice.	Concerned with justice – a sense of entitlement – which is a very different base of helping
People tended to be poor because of moral deficits. The problems were largely located within the individual	People were poor because of the environment. Blame largely located with the exploiters.
Social control function – developed to protect those above from the poor. Those who knew better would help those less fortunate. Charity and mercy merged into a kind of paternalism	Social control as well, but also an emphasis on social reform and emancipation. Workers lived in the community– which forever changed their lives and outlook too. All were members. Justice rather than mercy

African-American Helping Traditions: There was generally a pattern of forced segregation in housing so that frequently middle class and professional African-Americans lived with poor African-Americans. Black professionals intimately understood the problems engendered by poverty. They didn't need to live in Settlements to learn about the problems engendered by racism. Charity for the African-American community emerged from within the African-American community itself.

White people and social work mostly ignored African-Americans during this period. African-Americans developed their own agencies and social institutions. (E.g. 1st to develop homes for the aged. Developed orphanages, mutual aid societies, fraternal orders, churches). For the most part the settlements discriminated. The Settlements were often located away from the African-American communities and they were often rejected from membership. Jane Addams did help set up some segregated facilities. The Boards were mostly white and they were dependent on white donations. A few were integrated.

In the last ¼ of the 19th century COS began and eventually lead to the training of COS workers. Over 100 years ago the 1st school of social work formed as the New York School of Social Work which later became Columbia University School of Social Work. Emphasis was on case work	In 1923 Grace Coyle taught the first group work course at Western Reserve University.
In 1917 Mary Richmond wrote Social Diagnosis. She believed in the influence of the environment, but her primary emphasis was upon diagnosing within the individual and remedying the diagnosed problem. Some COS leaders became social reformers, e.g., Josephine Shaw Lowell	Living among and becoming part of the community served came to influence and shape the helping efforts of those known as group workers. Their efforts emphasized social participation, democratic process and a powerful belief in the effect of the environment on people. In 1930 Grace Coyle wrote Group Process in Organized Groups. She emphasized, social process, democratic participation, social goals, and partnership between worker and members.
Close alliance with psychiatry. Once the depression hit and need was so great – public welfare came about. COS workers searched for a service to provide and that service increasing was based on Freudian psychology with an emphasis on individual psychology. Casework moved further away from the environmental influence in Richmond's Social Diagnosis.	Group work had a broader base of influence: the settlements, youth serving organizations, play and recreation, and progressive adult education. From Settlements, group work embraced the values of social cause, democratic ideals, women as leaders, and mutual aid. From the Recreation and Youth Centers group work embraced the power of play, democratic ideals and character building. The use of activities in the social process and the role of activity as a means through which other objectives could be achieved (e.g., character building)

	From Progressive Adult Education group work embraced the importance of being in the process and the importance of involving the learner in the process. Democratic process and cooperation, rather than competition, were stressed
Casework took us forward beyond the emphasis on moral teaching, to what was considered a scientific method of study, diagnosis, treatment (the medical model)	Problem-solving methods, mutual aid, process, and democratic means were stressed.
Authority located in the caseworker who would investigate the need (study), understand the case (diagnosis), and then figure out what to do (treatment). Worker's authority was preeminent.	Source of help in the group. Members and mutual aid. Shared authority, shared power, shared control.

Assessment Exercise in Class

Purpose: This exercise is designed to teach assessment skills, especially being able to differentiate between facts and inference. In addition, students must identify the connection between the private troubles and public issues.

Work on data vs. inference by working on those questions from the final paper. Have them break into groups and describe the facts about the client(s) they are using for the final - then to make some inferences from those. Next have them share inferences based on the facts.

What are the salient facts involved? Consider the following areas: biological, psychological, familial, emotional, cognitive, cultural, race, class, sex, sexual orientation, physical environment (built and natural), and social environment (social networks, social supports, bureaucratic institutions, neighborhood, community, social relationships).

What <u>inferences</u> can you develop from these data about your client? What patterns can you

observe? What are her or his strengths, difficulties? What can you say about her or his

environment? What are the stress points for this individual as she or he tries to cope? What

inferences can you make about the connection between private troubles and public issues?

PURPOSE: The purpose of this middle phase piece of process (5th session) is to teach

students to both hear and work with the connection between private troubles and public

issues. In this example, the student individualizes, psychologizes, and for the most part

fails to recognize the process of mutual aid among the men. In the process of

psychologizing the environmental concern the student misses entirely the public issue with

which the men are grappling.

FLOOR GROUP IN NURSING HOME

SETTING: Home and Hospital for the Aged

GROUP MEMBERS: All males living together on a floor within a long term care facility.

Eighty percent of the members on the floor were white, non-Hispanic; ten percent were white

Hispanic, and ten percent were African-American. The average age was 86. All members in the

following session were white non-Hispanic.

THE WORKER: A 30 year old, German-American, first year social work student.

THE GROUP ITSELF: The group was an open-ended floor group meeting for the 31 residents living on an all-male floor. The group met weekly for 1½ hours. It was designed to provide an opportunity for residents to work on problems, issues, and concerns arising from institutional life and from being older persons. There was a student on the floor the year prior, but there had not been any meetings over the summer following the departure of the student. Floor groups had been in existence for only one year.

THE EXCERPT: This was the group's fifth meeting. Present were: Mr. Boxer, Mr. Scher, Mr. Dodge, Mr. Livsey, Mr. Katz, Mr. Waxman, Mr. Fox, Mr. Palmer, Mr. Schwartz, and Mr. Gold.

The meeting began with the residents speaking about the recent election. The group listened and talked a bit. Mr. Dodge then introduced a problem he had at breakfast, that his food did not come up very correctly. Other members in the group said we had discussed food in this group before and that nothing gets done about it. Mr. Dodge said yes, nothing can be done, nobody can get to the higher ups. We are all helpless. <u>I asked him if he felt that helplessness in other things beside the food in the hospital (1)</u>. He replied that he did. The other men joined in and said they felt helpless about everything. Mr. Katz joined in and said, yes, we are very helpless; we are just here waiting for the end. Mr. Dodge said yes, that's it, you just hit it right on the nose. Mr. Scher then said as soon as I came into the hospital I gave up; nothing can be done. <u>I asked him why he had given up (2)</u>. He said he was old and waiting to die. Mr. Dodge then said that's what happens, some of the men just don't do anything. Others want to make the most of it and others don't. That's why nobody comes to the meetings anymore. <u>I asked others in the group</u>

for their reaction (3). Most of them agreed that everybody has given up and very few of them haven't. Mr. Gold said if I give up then I will die; I'll have lost everything. Have you seen it at lunch time - when nobody talks to one another? I said I had eaten lunch up there the last week (4). He said you know what it's like; nobody talks to one another; there is no communication here. Mr. Dodge said yes, there is just apathy everywhere, and then he pointed to Mr. Scher and said, look, he's given up. Mr. Schwartz, who was new to the group, said to Mr. Dodge that he eats lunch with Mr. Scher and though Mr. Scher does not say anything he enjoys eating with him. I asked for Mr. Scher's reaction (5). He said he was pleased with what Mr. Schwartz said. Mr. Dodge then turned to Mr. Waxman and said Mr. Waxman, he is a foolish man - all he does is sing songs and clap his hands. Mr. Waxman answered, well, some things just don't click, you know. Anything you say to me goes in one ear and out the other. I asked Mr. Waxman if he was angry at Mr. Dodge for saying what he said (6). He said no, this man could never bother me.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this group work synopsis is to Demonstrate how a worker can move from working on life transitions, the initial point of entry, to public issues

Mothers in a Halfway House: A group worker runs a weekly group in a halfway house for women with small children. They are former substance abusers, they have been incarcerated, and most have had children placed in care. The ostensible purpose of the group is to help the women make a successful transition back to the community, and to help them learn and practice good parenting skills. Four months into the work, the mothers start complaining that they have no place to take their kids, that the little park a block away is filled with used needles and trash. The worker encourages the women to invite the police captain to their group to tell him ways they

think the park can be improved. The park is eventually cleaned and patrolled, and the women

begin to bring their babies there to play. Moreover, they feel wonderful about what they have

achieved.

From: Mondros, J. (2001). Building resourceful communities: A group worker's guide to

community work. In T. Kelly, T. Berman-Rossi & S. Palombo (Eds.) Group work: Strategies for

strengthening resiliency. New York: Haworth Press.

References

Germain, C. & Gitterman, A. (1996). *The life model of social work practice: Advances in theory and practice* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Kurland, R. & Salmon, R. (1998). *Teaching a methods course in social work with groups.* Alexandria, VA: CSWE.

Lee, J. A. B. (1985/1986). Seeing it whole: Social work with groups within an integrative perspective. *Social Work with Groups, 8*(4), 39-50.

Lee, J. A. B. (2001). *The empowerment approach to social work practice: Building the beloved community.* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Mondros, J. (2001). Building resourceful communities: A group worker's guide to community work. In T. Kelly, T. Berman-Rossi & S. Palombo (Eds.), *Group work: Strategies for strengthening resiliency* (pp. 35-50). New York: Haworth Press.

Reynolds, B. C. (1934). *Between client and community: A study in responsibility in social casework*. New York: Oriole.

Schwartz, W. (1994). Private troubles and public issues: One social work job or two. In T. Berman-Rossi (Ed.), *Social work: The collected writings of William Schwartz* (pp. 377-394). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers.

Schwartz, W. (1985/86). The group work tradition and social work practice. *Social Work with Groups,8*(4), 7-27.

Schwartz, W. (1968). *Group work in public welfare*. Chicago: American Public Welfare Association.