

**International Perspective on Group Work: Leadership, Practice, Research, and Teaching**, edited by Ana Puig, Bogusia Skudrzyk, Julieta Monteiro-Leitner, and A Michael Hutchins, Abingdon & New York, Routledge, 2016, xx + 264 pp., (hardback) ISBN: 978-1-138-19052-8

Group work has a long past in social work across all fields of practice. Its history, whilst proud and enduring, is illuminated by many differing theoretical positions, cultural tropes and articulations. Sometimes group work finds itself more in favour whilst at others it falls away, giving place to either individualised or community level practices. Group work is not constrained by one political philosophy in social work although, by its very nature, on a positive level it emphasises collectivities and solidarities, a social approach to human relations. On a more cynical plane, group work has been advocated as a means of reducing costs, an instrumental means to cost efficiencies in social service delivery. However, it remains a core model for social work practice and as such central to the education of future practitioners.

This book represents a very useful compendium to the textbooks and journal papers we already have concerning group work. It is an edited collection of already published journal articles taken from the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* drawn together by academics and practitioners working in the US, no bad thing in itself but indicative of the US focus which needs to be taken into account when using the work – a number of the international chapters are written by academics working in the US. So, taking this into account alongside there be no clear definition of what is meant in the book by ‘international group work’ it is most helpful to begin the collection with Bemak and Chung’s chapter *Critical issues in internal group counseling*. This concerns group counselling approaches, so focuses on the healing process and therefore not always translatable into social work models across nations, but it is nevertheless important for the human services professions in general. However, its central value perhaps lies in its call for critical reflection on practice across international settings and peoples. This, of course, is crucial and sets the scene for a book that pulls together a range of studies, reflections and practice-based articles from around the world. Nevertheless, I think the collection would have benefited from a more detailed explication of and excursus into the meanings of group work internationally and the different practices and theoretical understandings that permeate those cultures.

The range of countries covered by the articles that are included in the collection is impressive, and we can all learn from them. The thirteen chapters, encased within editorial analysis and reflection, report on group work from Asia, Africa, South America and Europe. They demonstrate intercultural collaborations and the need for indigenous authenticity in a globalised social and group work world. The social and collectivist aspects of group work are recognised by Ibrahim in a chapter that discusses international collaboration in the context of training for group work. These are pitted in tension against the growing emphasis on individual need and individuation in global neoliberalism, a perspective that influence all our human service professions as much as other aspects of the social world. The need for cultural sensitivity arising from this market-led

homogenising force is clearly recognised in Taephant et al.'s grounded theory study of group work leaders working in Asian contexts but having been trained for group work in the West – *A grounded theory of Western-trained Asian group leaders leading groups in Asia*. Pulling together more of these nuanced and critical discussions in the introductory and concluding chapters would have enhanced the book but its presence is important and provides 'food for thought' for those involved in group work throughout the world. For practitioners and academics in the West it raises important challenges against a taken-for-granted colonisation through seemingly benign helping behaviours. The education and training implications are well spelt out in this article. It raises the need for cultural sensitivity, appropriateness and, reading more deeply, along with other chapters in this book militates against the appropriation of indigeneity in group work by the powerful.

Education and training implications are dealt with in other chapters in this volume. These are usually undertaken from a group counselling perspective and so focus on the individual, therapeutic elements that can be gained from group work, albeit from within a collectivity. For instance, Coker and Majuta's work in Botswana – *Teaching group counseling in Botswana* - examines the importance of taking cross cultural issues into account in training situations and Barden et al. examine the impact of group intervention on the development of cultural sensitivity amongst those training for counselling practice in their chapter *International cultural immersion*.

Whilst the editors come from different parts of the world and bring disparate personalities to the editing process, they infuse the thought processes with these perspectives. They are drawn together by working in the US, which is of course itself large and diverse. Their editorial control, stemming from these standpoints, similarities and differences, helps to bring together a volume that has great relevance to group work practice across the world, to understanding the group leader's position and role and to recognising local and indigenous need as well as the transferability of knowledge. The works in the volume add to our resources for learning, teaching and pedagogy for social work in general. They do this by seeking to illuminate and illustrate rather than to present didactically core elements of the group work process. Educators will, however, need to read the chapters closely to identify, assess and channel ideas for the needs of their audiences.

Jonathan Parker  
Bournemouth University, UK  
[parkerj@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:parkerj@bournemouth.ac.uk)