

REVIEW

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GROUP CARE PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN, edited by Leon C. Fulcher and Frank Ainsworth.

"Group Care Practice with Children" is an important contribution to the field both for giving new significance to some of the standard areas in group care and for highlighting several new areas in the field today. This text is a follow-up volume to "Group Care for Children: Concept and Issues" (1981) edited by Ainsworth and Fulcher. Divided into three sections – the context, direct work with children, and indirect work on behalf of children – this volume provides eleven stimulating chapters which are rich in concepts and approaches for the advanced direct care practitioner, supervisor, children's services planner and graduate level student.

The editors do not attempt to be comprehensive in their selection of material. With two notable exceptions, the chapter titles cite common themes in the field. However common the themes, their treatment is generally with more depth and sophistication than is sometimes seen in texts for group care practitioners. A key contribution that is made is the application of information from allied orientations to the field of group care.

The editors assert that education and training for group care practitioners draws on material blended from "the broad orientations of education, recreation, counselling and care" (p. 5) while group care is itself a distinct occupation. Further, that "institutional care, residential group living, and day services operate with a group focus" (p. 4) whether operating within health care, education, social welfare or criminal justice resource systems. "By identifying the field of group care as it spans each of society's four major resource systems, and by calling attention to the common characteristics of programs in this field, it is therefore possible to consider group care as a discrete area of practice. As such, group care practice needs to take its place alongside other services that offer benefits to children and families" (p. 4). These two volumes by the editors, and the models they have developed for identifying the field of group care, do indeed demonstrate the complexity and describe many of the distinguishing aspects of this field.

The editors also open perspectives on the field that for many readers will be new or at least may deserve renewal as to their importance. They take a "comparative perspective, both cross-cultural and cross-national to ensure that theoretical and practical materials have a wider application" (p. xi). They assume an integrative attitude that stresses the role of cross-systems analysis (health care, education, social welfare, and criminal justice), the provision of quality service options across the full continuum of care and the interdisciplinary nature of team work. They assume the view that direct care practice is only one aspect of a field which also includes indirect service options and the perspective that group care extends in its applications to work with handicapped adults and the elderly as well as children. The focus of the work is to promote competence through treatment, teaching, nurturance and control and enhanced team functioning. They model a strong value on research in group work, primarily from an action research approach and certainly demonstrate this in a volume that is well referenced throughout.

There is an inference that could be misconstrued by some readers that deserves particular comment because it stands out like the proverbial "sore thumb" due to an unfortunate choice of words and context. "We have sought to provide materials that can be easily understood and used in practice. At the same time, we have selected materials based on established knowledge rather than simply anecdotal musings" (p. xii). This could be taken by some readers to be contrasting the academic style of the present text to the less formal narrative style that is common in the social service field. This plus its pejorative tone runs the risk of discouraging other writers and potential writers who are in direct care positions and whose first writing may not fit academic standards. Secondly, it could imply a false standard that the academic contribution is the most desirable and effective form of contribution. The present text and those of its caliber and contributors who are professors, social workers and "indirect" group care practitioners are vitally needed, if there is to be a literature of "established knowledge." Yet the need for different levels and styles of published educational and training materials, especially those from "direct" care practitioners, will be crucial for some time to come as the field continues to move beyond its previously oral and narrative "knowledge base." To generalize this point further, if texts of this caliber are to be "easily understood and used" in the work of practitioners like Jerry, "the apocryphal and yet surprisingly real group home worker" (p. 82) that Casson graphically depicts in Chapter Four, then care will need to be taken not only toward assuring the relevance, applicability and readability of the material but also toward the subtle attitudinal tone of the writing.

By way of shortcomings, the discriminating reader will be advised to

remember the aims of this volume, "to draw together, from both sides of the Atlantic, contributions which make use of concepts and issues outlined in our earlier volume *Group Care for Children* (1981)" (p. 1). The reader must not expect a tight treatment of the perspectives and models of Fulcher and Ainsworth but, rather, selections which are compatible with and exemplify some aspect of the models. Additionally, this writer found that the shortcomings that seemed apparent for a volume seeking to provide materials to be used in practice, were often accounted for in their first very rich volume. In future editions, it would seem not only valid but very helpful to the practitioner to context them as companion volumes by drawing even more detailed ties between them. The first volume adds considerable strength and applicability to the second volume. Together they represent a particularly strong example of the caliber of contributions that are emerging in group care in the 80s.

Its chapters deal with such areas as the models of group care of Ainsworth and Fulcher, the dilemmas and strains caused between primary care and clinical requirements and the secondary organizational demands of direct care practice, the culture of group care, the enhancement of program and team-building through the Action Planning method, the need for and approaches to differential assessment, competency-based assessment and curriculum-building, the therapeutic role of activity planning, the utilization of differential assessment to improve treatment and team functioning, the role and function of the "boundary worker," the group worker as a teacher of parents, and the concluding chapter, the future direction of practice and training.

In Section I, "the context of practice," Henry W. Maier articulates the many dilemmas caused when practitioners must serve two masters and account for both the organizational demands of the job and the immediate child care concerns. His clear, insightful and immediately applicable style of analysis offers the reader early evidence that this text is for the direct care practitioner as well. He is adept at portraying "just how it works" as well as the real complexity and dignity of the direct line professional's role.

Completing this section, Ainsworth and Fulcher delineate various aspects that must be accounted for when developing a quality culture in a group care center. The queries that follow each aspect offer the reader immediate opportunities to examine the implications of the discussion by assessing the group care center in which he or she may work.

In Section II, "Working directly with children," authors Stephen F. Casson, Gale E. Burford, Richard W. Small and Fulcher, and Karen D. Vander Ven present four chapters which work together well and when read as a whole each generally complements the others and fills in the critical points that may be lacking in the other. The section could also

be subtitled "assessment, planning and intervention."

Casson uses a particularly graphic and effective depiction of Jerry, "a real group home worker," to show the waste in effort and loss of potential positive impact with his children that is contrasted with other alternatives "Jerry" could have considered. This afforded a potent basis for presenting the Action Plan method of program enhancement and team-building which he effectively details. Questions remain for this reader: To what extent has the research relied on external program consultants to implement Action Planning for particular centers? What does the experience suggest with agencies implementing their own Action Plan using in-house leaders?

In Burford's chapter, the Interpersonal Maturity Classification System: Juvenile (Warren, 1966) provides the backbone for the differential assessment approach that he presents (also utilized by Casson). He provides a fine balance of presentation about the need for differential assessment, the practical problems and dilemmas facing the group care practitioner in their use, and the possibilities offered by this particular approach. In another book or article, it would be useful to have from the writer a detailed treatment of how such an assessment system interfaces with the writing of action objectives, the broader treatment/care plan, the ongoing progress review and the updating process.

Small and Fulcher delineate the general areas to be addressed in a competency-based approach to assessing learning styles. Several valuable points are raised that warrant expansion. How, specifically, does a group worker adapt curriculum development strategies from special education as well as adapt an attitude of curriculum-thinking to work in the group milieu? How does a center integrate its group care assessment and curriculum planning with the classroom (as well as other services)? What is the impact of assessing the styles of learning of workers as well as the children? What is the impact of workers exchanging experience across service domains (a group care worker helping in the classroom, a teacher helping with recreational activities, a social worker participating in milieu activities)?

The chapter by Vander Ven provides the reader with the guidelines, detail, clarity, examples, and step-by-step specificity where needed, to enable the experienced practitioner to begin activity programming. In addition, this chapter complements the previous chapter's discussion of curriculum development and provides the reader much specific information that is helpful in that area as well.

In the Third Section, "Indirect work on behalf of children," Burford and Fulcher present their study of team functioning which was designed "to determine whether particular patterns of satisfaction, frustration, and/or uncertainty in quality of working life were evident

amongst staff teams depending on the diagnostic characteristics of the resident group" (p. 188). The question is an important one. It is clear to this writer that the development and utilization by group care workers of differential assessment approaches is crucial for the development of the technology of the field and is crucial for the advancement of the profession. Some areas that would warrant further expansion include: comparisons of the merits and limitations of the assessment tools for group care use, practical applications of their results to group care and the ways additional assessment efforts can aid team development, clinical and research purposes. Given the central importance of differential assessment, treatment planning and team functioning and the rather extensive experience of the authors, a future text on these subjects with an applied orientation would certainly be received in the field with great interest.

In the chapter, "Working across boundaries in group care practice," Hopkinson's "boundary worker" has the creativity, clarity, relevance and "obviousness" to constitute a discovery. It is something like the concept of the "networker" twenty years ago which eventually produced the "new" technologies of networking. In fact, there are numerous similarities between these concepts, but simplistically, the boundary worker is an in-house networker and a facilitator-consultant-advocate-practitioner. This is a "sleeper" of a chapter. The chapter and the phenomena that are described deserve special attention.

"The group care worker as a teacher of parents," by Conte, highlights another creative and very significant contribution by this volume. Conte introduces an important phenomenon subject that is emerging. By identifying it and describing its characteristics and process, he enables the reader to get a clear idea about the potential for implementing this approach. He introduces the concept of the natural tie between the functions of a group care worker and the functions of the parent trainer. Although not a new idea, there is scant literature (one exception is found in Peterson and Brown, 1979) on this subject. Conte provides an appropriate overview of the parent training literature and issues, sufficient to provide a starting base for exploring the possibilities of designing a proposal or for initiating a parent training effort. To conclude, he closes with a statement with which this writer certainly concurs, "For the group care worker, training parents represents an effective means of addressing the age-old dilemma of how to work meaningfully with a child's parent(s)" (p. 262).

The final chapter by the editors on the future direction of practice and training, although brief, deserves thoughtful reading (along with its accompanying references). The contributions of the editors and writers presented in this volume as well as those of the first volume are certain

to move the field ahead. They will add to its stature and will clarify and enhance its image in the public's eye but beyond this there are tools of concept and method that will surely improve our work with young people and families. This writer looks forward to future volumes that would further extend these themes for their application to the work of the advanced direct group care practitioner.

REFERENCES

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