

SWRK 409
SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS
(Ragg, 2010, Garvin 2011-2013)

GROUPS, COLLECTIVES AND ILLUSIONS OF GROUP

Voluntary Formed Group

This is the ideal group. The worker selects members to participate in the group. Members have a say in membership and most often do not know the other members. Work focuses on helping members to find common ground, develop sense of purpose and establish group norms.

Involuntary Group

This is a very common type of group where someone is insisting on member attendance. The members still do not know each other prior to the group. The work focuses on dealing with the pressure to attend, finding a reason to be together, developing purpose, and building inter-member connections. Often the worker needs to thwart member attempts to identify the group as a source of persecution.

Transitory Groups

In some settings group membership changes weekly making it difficult to develop group cohesion. Drop in settings, street level groups, inpatient psychiatric groups and other settings attract transitory group membership. Such groups are often one session groups with the membership changing for the next meeting. If a core membership can establish more group power can emerge. Often such groups are issue related with a member raising a concern, the leader garners the group energy to help the member while trying to engage others through developing common ground.

Pre-Existing Groups

Often group workers are asked to do some work with groups that have been ongoing. For example, a group leader leaves the agency and the worker is the new worker. Beginning with such groups often involves having the existing group members orient you to the group norms and processes. The worker must find a way to engage into the group and then identify areas of permanence and potential influence. It is important to make this assessment before trying to influence the group. Workers give reverence to important pre-existing elements while negotiating areas for future influence.

Ongoing Collectives

Workers are often asked to work with groups that have an ongoing shared history (e.g., classes, teams, residential groupings). In such situations the task is to establish the group work as something unique and different from the status quo collective. This often requires creative use of subgroups and careful contracting. It is important to remember that the ongoing collective will limit the impact of group programming.

Illusionary Groups

Some settings pull together clients with no consideration of common ground or membership overlaps. Often leadership changes from week to week and membership may be similar. Such groups are collectives are really not groups per-se because no commonalities emerge.