CORE CONCEPTS & PRINCIPLES

Mutual aid orientation

- Communities consist of mutually interdependent individuals and groups
- Group is made up of multiple helping relationships
- Members’ relationships with one another are primary source of growth and change
- Advantages include:
  - De-pathologizes, universalizes, and de-stigmatizes individuals’ struggles
  - Empowers members
  - Promotes social justice and social change
  - Facilitates mutual acceptance and demand for work
  - Recognizes diversity, difference, and individuality

Group as a social system

- Includes norms, roles, and communication patterns
- Individual behavior of members understood within the context of the group

Group types and purpose

- Groups organized for different, sometimes overlapping, purposes reflecting member needs and agency and/or environmental context
- May be preventative, remedial, supportive, organized for social change or a combination
- Range includes educational and problem-solving to task and social action
- Considerations regarding number and length of sessions, number of participants, open/closed membership, single/co-leadership reflect group purpose and type

Phases of group development

- Individual and collective group behavior evolves over time as members develop comfort with one another
- Worker’s tasks, skills, and responsibilities change over time in response to changes in group and individual behavior
- Characteristics of collective and individual behavior in beginning, middle, and ending phase

Role of activity

- May be necessary to facilitate the group’s development and accomplishment of members’ goals
• May be means through which mutual aid and group purpose is accomplished, depending upon needs of members
• Includes, but is not limited to, art, movement, games, drama, and music (i.e., techniques used as alternatives to or in conjunction with talking) and members engaging in collective action

**Group worker’s role**
• Identify and foster members’ underlying commonality
• Help members achieve their individual, group, and community goals through participation in group
• Help group negotiate agency and community environment
• Attend to and facilitate group process to promote and enhance the group’s work and mutual aid among members
• Promote sociocultural safety between members and between members and the worker

**Worker skill**

**Preparation phase**
• Contract with agency and/or community
• Use anticipatory empathy to identify common need of potential members and appropriate group purpose
• Selection, screening, recruitment of members
• Decide on number, frequency, and length of sessions
• Locate space conducive to group’s purpose
• Develop initial division of labor, if there are co-leaders

**Beginning phase**
• Clarifying purpose and role of group, members, and worker
• Clarifying expectations
• Dealing with issues of authority
• Establishing a culture for work
• Reaching for member feedback regarding group and individual goals
• Scanning/monitoring the group
• Pointing out connections between members
• Encouraging member-to-member communication

**Middle phase**
• Empathy, elaborating, clarification skills
• Sessional contracting and ending
• Connecting the individual to the group through reframing
• Monitoring group process and responding to members’ interactions with one another, the worker, and the environment, to enhance mutual aid
• Dealing with taboo subjects
• Demanding work
• Re-contracting with the group its purpose and norms, if needed
• Assisting the group to manage transitions (i.e., changes in membership)
• Addressing internal group obstacles to group’s purpose, growth, and change
• Use of self to promote mutual aid and collective action

**Ending and transitions phase**
• Assisting members to achieve closure in their relationships, including, as necessary, the individual ending with the group, members ending with each other, and the group ending with the worker
• Providing follow up and ongoing services to members as needed
• Assisting group to maintain a structure for future work, if needed

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS IN FIELD PLACEMENT**

Students should have the opportunity to:
• Develop and, if possible, implement, a proposal for a group work service that responds to client and/or community needs, including:
  o Contract with agency
  o A statement of group purpose and goals
  o Recruitment of members
  o Selection of physical space
  o Decision about session frequency, length, format
  o Development of a method to evaluate the group
• Facilitate or co-facilitate a group from preparation through ending phases
• Record their group work practice
• Process their group work practice in supervision
• Process their group work practice with co-leader, if relevant
• Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their group work practice

**STUDENT COMPETENCIES**

Upon completion of the generalist/foundation curriculum, students should understand the role of the social worker with groups and be able to:
• Identify the legal, ethical, and value issues which are unique to working with groups

• Trace the historical, institutional, philosophical and methodological roots of group work and its development as a distinct method of helping within the social work profession

• Integrate and apply theory and research to their group work practice

• Articulate the role of the group as a system of mutual aid for assisting individuals, groups, and communities in addressing personal and collective issues

• Distinguish between and specify the appropriate use of different group types
• Recognize how socio-cultural forces such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity, influence the group, its members, the worker, and her or his group work practice

• Define and make appropriate use of activity to enhance mutual aid and the group’s work

• Understand the concept of the group-as-a-whole and recognize the characteristics of group culture (i.e., norms and roles)

• Identify phases of group development and characteristic group behavior

• Assess group process, including role relationships and communication patterns, and its influence on member interactions and the group’s ability to engage in mutual aid

• Adopt a simultaneous focus on the individual and the group-as-a-whole and the group and its environment

• Specify practice skills in the preparation, beginning, middle, and ending phases of group

• Evaluate the effectiveness of group work intervention.