

[Part II]

*Group Work Practice Theory Essential
to Practice with Both Socially Competent
and Socially Unskilled Populations*



Part 2 is focused on elements of practice theory that are relevant to all group work practice but have particular importance to practice with socially unskilled populations. The materials begin with an acknowledgment of the multiple influences activated in small groups and the view of the capability of small group use in the profession of social work. To these fundamentals is added a description of the unique interventive pattern characteristic of social work practice methodology with groups. The materials then focus on a set of professional norms relevant both to normative practice and to the specialized practice described in this book. The norms influence both the social worker and the group members and tend to create or approximate an egalitarian group form, serviceable for group work purposes and practices of the profession.

The chapters in this part identify the theoretical source materials that inform the Specialized Methodology of practice with socially unskilled populations and introduce the methodology, its context, and its contribution.

Chapter 4 reviews the social science literature on the potency of the small group, followed by a view of the domesticated small group for specialized professional purposes expressed in the literature of social work with groups.

The chapter distinguishes the capability of the professionally formed group from that of the self-formed group, reconstituted with a social worker.

Chapter 5 identifies the special characteristics of professional intervention in social work with groups, derived from the necessity of monitoring and attending multiple aspects of individual and group functioning concurrently. The interventive pattern is employed in both Mainstream practice and the Specialized Methodology, with greater demands for social worker action in the latter.

Chapter 6 presents a set of special norms emanating from the profession of social work and influencing both the social worker and the group participants. These norms have the power to create a group form unique to the profession. They tend to shape the group as egalitarian, a form well adapted for helping purposes. An egalitarian group form is desirable, permitting optimal access between members and the resources of the group and the assistance of the worker to each member. The norms, scattered through social work literature, are brought together in chapter 6 to assess their composite impact. The norms have an impact on purpose, relationships, group structure and functioning, and the ways in which the content of the group experience is shaped.

Chapters 7 and 8 present theoretical materials, identified as the Broad Range Model and the Mainstream Model, that together contribute to the Specialized Methodology of this text. The Broad Range Model defines a continuum of three group forms, each of which reflects a range in the social functioning capability of the participants, differences in the nature of the entity, and associated adaptations to the role and tasks of the social worker. The range is from allonomous groups, which require major assistance from the social worker in order to function, to autonomous groups, which function well with limited professional assistance. Between these two is an intermediate, transitional group form with some features of both allonomous and autonomous groups and incorporating aspects of the practice methodologies associated with both. The allonomous group is the most likely form achievable with socially unskilled persons.

Elements in the Mainstream Model are described. Selected features are identified that are incorporated into the Specialized Methodology as essential elements enabling the practice to be effective.

In Chapter 9 the Specialized Methodology for practice with socially unskilled populations is introduced, and its relationship to Mainstream practice is explored. The chapter identifies the context of the Specialized Methodology and its contribution to practice knowledge pertaining to work with individuals in group.