

Long Island Institute  
for Group Work With  
Children and Youth  
North Shore Child & Family  
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# HUH ?!?

a newsletter about working  
with children and youth in groups

Volume 2, Number 3.

★ Special 6-Page Bonus Issue ★

Summer - 1997

The Mission of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth is: To promote and enhance effective group work practice with children and youth through advocacy, education, and collegial support. **HUH?!** is the Institute's quarterly newsletter dedicated to providing information, inspiration and support for anyone working with young people in group settings.

### From the Steering Committee

The old adage: "Variety is the spice of life," is something that seems to both appeal to and threaten many young people. One of the developmental paradoxes of adolescence is the teenager's fiery demand to be valued as an individual while simultaneously gravitating toward an all-conforming peer group: the "jocks," the "brains," or the "burnouts," for example. Frequently the stakes are high when it comes to being "different" from other teens. Similar to the adult world, aspects of one's identity that are "different" bare a profound stigma, considerably augmented within an adolescent culture where rigid norms define what is "good" or "bad." Youth who are overweight, from cultural minorities, or with learning disabilities often go through their teenage years feeling profoundly isolated. This isolation is all too often compounded by harassment and even violence from their peers. In specific, consider the experience of the teenager who discovers that he or she is sexually/affectionately different from most of his or her peers - the young person who is lesbian or gay.

Lesbian and gay young people typically find themselves at the margins of adolescent culture. Clearly, one of the worst ways that a teenager can be seen as different is to be identified as gay, an identity bound in stereotypes of the sexual predator, the effeminate man, of the manly woman. For lesbian and gay teens, this aspect of their identity, while invisible, often excludes them from forming close relationships with peers. Those who choose to remain invisible within their families, schools, and communities, have the challenge of keeping an uncomfortable secret to themselves. This invisibility takes a considerable toll on their emotional health, wondering if the people close to them would reject them if they found out the real truth and keeping relationships with peers and family members at an arm's length. For the gay youth who becomes visible, one faces the challenge of negotiating the hostile reactions of peers and sometimes teachers and family members.

Like all young people, isolated teenagers need places where they can feel safe, valued and affirmed. For the lesbian or gay teenager, a group can provide this kind of forum where support can be gleaned in the most developmentally-appropriate way - through positive experiences with peers. Groups for lesbian and gay teenagers further become places where the stigma of being different

*Continued Page Three*

### From the Editor

While conducting workshops I often begin by polling the audience. How many are currently working with a kid's group? How many have worked with a kid's group in the past? How many have ever been a member of a kid's group? How many have ever been a kid?

My aims are to provide a warm up, find out who's there, and to establish common ground. The question I usually ask last is the one that generates the most powerful response. How many who have worked with kids in groups have ever felt incompetent? First a brief pause, followed by sideways glances, tentative shoulder and arm movements, and then all hands shoot up.

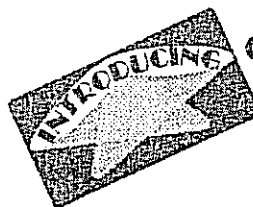
Once this taboo area is revealed it seems to takes some of the edge off and increase the comfort level. We're all in the same boat (yes, my hand is raised too).

Later in the workshop, if I use video tapes of my own practice, I have observed that participants especially like to see me having a hard time, not making the perfect intervention (whatever that is), or at a loss for what to do next. My first impulse is to defend myself by explaining my subtle yet undetectable maneuvers, despite all appearances to the contrary. I've learned, for the most part, however, to let it pass. I try to remind myself about putting my ego outside the door. After all it's not really about me, its about affirmation that this is what kid's groups often look like, what they feel like. They make noise, move around, act silly, touch things, laugh, have fun, squabble...

The reflex to control and put a stop to such behavior can be overwhelming for some group workers. I've learned that much of this has to do with one's own image as a professional. And, it is very often reinforced by colleagues who don't work with kids in groups. You've seen it I'm sure, a raised eye-brow here or an incredulous look there, an unconscious process of behavior modification, aversive conditioning with one aim: **Make them talk, they must talk, no fun here, no noise here, only talk, insightful talk, make them sit, sit and talk...**

As my eight-year old might say, "yeah right!" (see Chaos Corner, this issue).

*Andy Malekoff* Editor



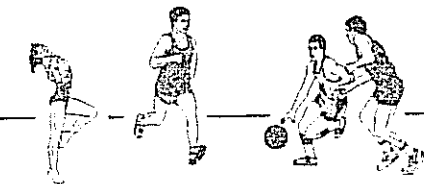
### Publication Announcement Group Work With Adolescents

Principles and Practice  
By Andrew Malekoff, ACSW

Contact: Guilford Publications, Inc.  
Toll Free: 1-800-365-7006

## Looking Back...A Reminiscence From Phys Ed to Group Work With a Five-Cent Raise In-Between By Ruth Middleman

This is the third  
feature in a  
continuing series.



I just happened into group work, and into social work. Growing up I never heard such words. In college I was a phys ed major, not because I was particularly good at any sport; but I was in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, my home town, and I leaned toward what was called "informal education/recreation." I believed people would want to learn more if they were not in a lock-step situation and if they had a say in what went on.

When I was 20 and ready to graduate, there were job interviews for teaching positions offered to all the students in my department - except me! I watched them get interviews and jobs. Although I had Highest Honors, and other scholarship activity awards, there were no calls for me. So I went to the Department Head to find out what was going on. She said that she was sorry, that there were more jobs than graduates, and I'd get an interview before long. I was astonished. I was naive, but sobered. I looked at her and blurted, "I'm first, not last!" And I went up to the 22nd floor in that same building, the Cathedral of Learning, and applied for group work at the School of Applied Social Science. This turned out to be a great move. Social Worker; no more Teacher, or so it seemed at the time. Later, I was to learn I could combine the two careers.

By then I had met

group work students who were in field placements at Brashear Settlement on Pittsburgh's South Side where I worked during my senior year. I was glad to earn money for some living expenses - 35 cents an hour! I led many classes and groups. One night the Director visited me in action with a group and told my supervisor, "Give her a raise." My supervisor answered, "O.K. but all the part-time persons should also get a raise." We all got 5 cents an hour raise...which seemed so big. I was the gym teacher, the dance lady, the craft person, the games leader - you name-it: I did it. Folk song singer, square dance caller, drama coach, Red Cross swim instructor, with years of camping experience. And I played the accordion, too. I had lots of skills and collections of things to do...much more than I had know-how about helping others! I had the activities. I needed to learn what to do with them and people at the same time.

Gertrude Wilson welcomed me warmly and made me feel wanted. What a relief? And she was to become my major teacher. Years later I learned that she had doubts about admitting me since I was so young. Could I really become a group worker? A social worker? I admit now that I was pretty young for all this. And it took me many years to learn what I needed to know and be in thought and feeling. I became a much less busy worker over the years.

My small area of esoteric knowledge (activities to use with groups) worked well for me. I had moved to Philadelphia and worked in Jewish Centers. After two years I was asked to be a part-time Lecturer at the Pennsylvania School of Social Work to teach a class, PROGRAM SKILLS. Delighted and scared I was. The first thing I did was to change the name to become THE USE OF PROGRAM IN GROUP WORK PRACTICE. This became an important focus for the rest of my career. I wrote a book, *The Non-Verbal Method in Working with Groups*, (1968) and tried in many ways to teach and show that program was not an end in itself. It was a step, a means in the process of relating with group members, a kind of communication through which the real goals of the group were pursued. I wrote in the book that program is the vehicle through which the needs and interests of the group members are expressed - a fresh idea in those days.

Along with teaching, I made opportunity to work with groups over the years. In this way I hoped to keep my teaching fresh, and besides, I liked the work. I can't mention all of them, but here are some of my groups: Women Organized Against Rape, Cub Scout Den Mother, unmarried mothers-to-be in a hospital / residence, Adults Molested as Children, Tinnitus sufferers, and especially, I

think of the Black teens in the Motivation Group.

It was this group that I was to meet with in its 6th session the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated. I was frightened and wanted to stay home. I called my friend and co-leader, a Black psychologist of enormous respect and skill, to express my doubts. He said I just had to come; that this was important. I had been honest and direct with this group; I had dealt with their angers before. In an earlier session one militant Black girl, a vice president and leader in high school, called me a white liberal, said she was sick of people like me with good intentions who had not helped kids a whit...I had never *lived* in her neighborhood, etc. When she finished, all eyes were on me. I was set back momentarily by the strength of her argument, but then said, "You're doing to me what you say you don't want whites to do to you, stereotype and lump me in with all whites." The group settled in to letting me be part of their discussions. The 6th session was filled with despair and violent rage, often directed at me as a member of the white race. Michael, a group member, said if he were me, he'd be at home hiding under his bed. It was some challenge to make of this session a worthwhile thing. I think we did.

❖ Ruth Middleman is Professor Emerita, Raymond A. Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville

**In the Trenches**

Anyone working in a middle school knows the daily torture that many students face at the hands of their peers. It is amazing how perceptive kids are in figuring out the one thing that would absolutely mortify and humiliate their target. For example, an overweight child is called "fat," only it is spelled "phat" because that's not considered to be a put down! (It is unbelievable how creative their definitions of words become.) And they'll go right ahead to tell you what "phat" means in an attempt to justify the action.

If a young adolescent doesn't dress, act and look like everyone else they become potential victims of verbal and sometimes physical harassment. What must it feel like to travel through the halls everyday with people calling out such things as, "hey slut" or "you're so gay" ? For some children, especially those that stand out in some way, this is what they must face every day - in classes, lunchrooms, locker rooms, and simply walking through the hallways.

How many times have we as compassionate workers wanted to go out into the halls and classes and scream at the abusers? But where do we begin? What do we do? I have always felt somewhat helpless to combat the pervasive harassment that is inflicted upon so many of the students that I know.

This year I stumbled upon an approach for dealing with this problem. As a social worker in a middle school I was concerned about a particular seventh grade girl with developmental disabilities who was socially isolated

and depressed. I'll refer to her as Tina. Unfortunately, Tina's way of coping with feelings of rejection was to be hostile and aggressive toward her peers. They reciprocated by being just as nasty toward her. Nothing I said or did seemed to change this destructive cycle. I happened to mention this problem in one of my eighth grade girls' groups. They were all very concerned about this girl and wanted to help. So I started to hold small group meetings with girls from the group and Tina. The eighth graders became older friends within and beyond the confines of the group meetings.

It wasn't and still isn't a smooth ride. Tina often turns on them if things don't go according to her expectations. Nevertheless, overall the results have been remarkable. She went from being a depressed loner with no friends to a much happier person with many new friends. The idea of helping another special education student spread to others, who also decided to be a part of this plan. I welcome all newcomers.

We're all learning so much from this experience. Tina is learning how to make friends and what it means to be a friend. The others are learning that although some students may be different in some ways, children with special needs also hurt and love and need friends just as they do. I am once again reminded of the power of students helping each other and of the caring and sensitivity often hidden in the hearts of so many middle school aged children.

~ Joanne Ditchik-Stutz

**Long Island Institute for Group Work  
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**From The Steering  
Committee**

*Continued From Page One*  
can be reevaluated. Myths and biases are immediately challenged through seeing and hearing from other gay young people who don't fit the stereotypes. Moreover, young people can work together to develop tools for negotiating a world that will be at times rejecting. Groups can provide places for learning life skills in an affirming space and opportunities to connect with a community in preparation for entry into an adult world.

Teenagers are often grouped together by workers based on an aspect of their identities that is stigmatizing (e.g. antisocial behavior, substance abuse, teen pregnancy) although the worker may not immediately see the group members as young people who bare a common stigma. The group affords an opportunity to reevaluate the labels placed on these teens and search for the strengths that allow these young people to make it through adolescence intact. Perhaps more than any other therapeutic milieu, a group naturally builds positive identity for teenagers. For one thing, we know that youth pay

greater attention to their peers than to adults. Group members who have survived difficult experiences serve as role models for others who are struggling with the stigma of being different. The stigmatized teenager has a chance to form valuable connections with peers that will help him or her establish a positive group identity and develop the pro-social values that we wish to instill in our young. Have you ever considered starting a group for lesbian and gay teenagers at your school or agency? What changes might you expect in the participating youth?

The message here is that groups can be a powerful influence in the lives of young people who are pushed away from their peers. All too often these are the same young people who are overlooked in schools and communities. The young person who has a chance to see and hear from others like himself or herself experiences an immediate sense of relief: "I'm not the only one going through this!" Groups can pull together kids who share a stigmatized identity, help build consciousness, and provide an impetus for changing an environment that may be stacked against them.

~ by Andrew Peters

**chaos corner**

*Group Work with Children and Adolescents*

*Playing, planning, confronting, creating, fighting, protecting, joking, berating; Burping, sleeping, farting, snacking, cooperating, disrupting, insulting, attacking; Listening, ignoring, teasing, supporting, resolving, deciding, defying, conforming; Pondering, clowning, denying, admitting, talking, laughing, standing, sitting; Yelling, crying, touching, hugging, opening, closing, coming, going; Dancing, singing, grabbing, poking, mimicking, acting, threatening, stroking;*

*Revealing, hiding, prying, confiding, Stretching, crawling, jumping, falling; Taking, giving, thanking and living.*

*By Andrew Malekoff*

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**A Letter To The Editor**



"Love Them and Limit Them and Help Them to Achieve" is a jingle which is a throwback to the group work bible of Wilson and Ryland, as is the "Looking Back" piece by Irving Levine (Winter, 2:1). It brought back memories and motivated me to subscribe to "What's that name?!?"

I may have been a few years older than Irving but the experiences sounded real enough, except that I went to the "functional" University of Pennsylvania, came through nicely, and am here to tell the tale. I was with the New York City Youth Board, referred to in the article, for 35 years. I remember Arthur Miller's getting his feet wet with the street gang groups. Unfortunately his intended play about the gangs never got to be written because of the mean and stupid McCarthy phenomenon. The fearful people voted the idea down, ending the hopeful Miller creative theatrical event.

It should be noted that a large part of that era was influenced by the effective use of groups. Group work should not be shunted away to the ancient history section of the library but should be recognized as a most useful and functional (!) part of a helping process.

Kurt Sonnenfeld  
Forest Hills, N.Y.

The Editor invites letters from readers and reserves the right to edit for clarity and to meet space requirements.

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## TIPS For: ENDINGS

This month's "TIPS for:" column is devoted to the ending transition in groups. Separation from the group may occur in various ways. For example, a single member leaves, the worker leaves, or the group-as-a-whole comes to an end.

**TIP:** Separations should be brought up early enough to assure that the leavetaking is meaningful, allowing adequate time for review and reminiscence. Ending should not be brought up so far in advance that the work of the group in the middle phase becomes overwhelmed by anxiety about separation. However in short term groups endings are imminent from the beginning and must be carefully and gradually woven into the fabric of the evolving group from the start.

**GOOD ENDINGS REQUIRE GOOD JUDGMENT & GOOD TIMING**



## BOOK BRIEFS



*The Other 23 Hours: Child-Care Work with Emotionally Disturbed Children in a Therapeutic Milieu.* Albert Trieschman, James Whittaker, and Larry Brendtro. Aldine de Gruyter, 200 Saw Mill River Rd., Hawthorne, NY 10532, 1969, 240 pages, \$26.95, softcover.

The *Other 23 Hours* was first published almost 30 years ago. It is a timeless classic to be discovered by each new generation. The book contains nine chapters including "Understanding the Stages of a Typical Temper Tantrum." Although an institutional setting provides the backdrop, the principles and practices have broader implications for work with young people. The volume's theoretical underpinnings are ego psychology, sociobehavioral theory, and Red's "life space" model. Regardless of orientation, most impressive is the real-life-feel for the work described, illustrated, and conceptualized by these author-practitioners. Hardly a sanitized version of group life with kids, it is clear from the start that where they speak of they have been. The *Other 23 Hours* is essential reading for anyone working with young people.

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## EVENTS AND RESOURCES

- **The video tape** of the "A Sense of Alienation or Belonging: Building Bridges through Group Involvement" conference is now available. The video is 23 minutes long and contains highlights of the Long Island Institute on Group Work with Children and Youth Action Research Conference. The video is \$15.00 to HUH?!? subscribers and \$20.00 to non-subscribers. The video is ideal for motivating the development of new groups in your agency and/or community. It provides highlights of the November, 1996 action research conference. It depicts an intergenerational, cross cultural meeting using an integrated large- and small-group format to address the need for more and better groups for young people. This video is certain to inspire. Make checks payable to the Long Island Institute for Group Work. Send to: Jane Yazdpoor, NSC&FGC; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.
- **Reminder:** AASWG Annual Symposium in Quebec City, Province of Quebec, Canada, October 23-26, 1997. For information write to Daniel Turcotte, Ph.D., School of Social Work, Laval University, Quebec City, Province of Quebec, G1K 7P4.
- **Professional Training:** A special Summer Certificate Program entitled "The Multi-Dimensional Child", a study of the emotional growth of the child from infancy to school age, is offered through the Lindner Early Childhood Training Institute of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center. This program is presented by Sandy Wolkoff, CSW, a nationally known lecturer and trainer and host of the television program *Ages and Stages*. The seminar will be held for five consecutive Wednesday mornings from July 2nd through July 30th (inclusive). The tuition is \$150.00 per person and includes all of the course materials and bibliography. The five three-hour sessions will be held at NSC&FGC; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577. For registration information contact: Jane Yazdpoor at (516) 626-1971 ext. 3009 - Fax: (516) 626-8043.