A Theory of Groupwork Practice

Also by Tom Douglas

Decade of Small Group Theory

Groupwork Practice

Basic Groupwork

Group Processes in Social Work

Groups: Understanding People Gathered Together

Group Living

Handbook of Common Groupwork Problems

A Theory of Groupwork Practice

Tom Douglas

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*To Shirley, as ever, for her
love and constant support*

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Preface

This book attempts to address one principal issue and one secondary issue: (1) to provide a common theoretical structure for all forms of groupwork practice, and (2) to make a primary comment about the perplexing and often misunderstood problem of influence. The first is based upon either the idea of a common thread which runs through everything that groupworkers do, or, what often amounts to the same thing seen from a different viewpoint, to accept that some ideas, concepts, principles and so on are bigger, more global in scope than others and can thus contain within their general structure many ideas and practices which have arisen and are used in an independent and sometimes apparently competitive form. In either case the aim is to provide a *theory of practice* (what groupworkers do) which is comprehensive, logical and useful, but which does not seek to replace loyalty to specific theoretical approaches, but rather to clarify the relationship of these to a larger and logical whole.

The second and minor (in this context) issue derives from the need to make it explicit that there is no such thing as a value-free intervention technique even if that technique is apparently based upon so-called 'non-intervention'. What is at issue is not 'to be or not to be' interventionist, but how much, in what way, with what consequences and above all with what intent any form or pattern of groupwork operates.

The Heisenberg Principle of Uncertainty states that ultimate facts continually recede. Thus to expose the influence systems which operate in groupwork promotes the idea that such influences should be made visible because it is not possible to operate without them. But underlying that idea is a value (or values) which accepts that such openness is essential and under-

neath or behind that lies another set of values which is concerned with the manner of dealing with other human beings and so on.

So, knowing this to be the case (and this knowing is one of the stages in the process), one is forced into accepting the 'As If' syndrome, as in 'I know there are more factors involved but in this case I will act as if there were not.' Thus the factor of importance is 'choice' – what can be accepted as the appropriate cut-off point. There are no certainties, though most of us act 'as if' there were, often at inappropriately 'high' levels of cut-off.

The continuum of leadership is not therefore one which ranges from directive to non-directive, but one in which the application of influence takes different forms, producing different consequences, but, it is hoped, always with the same basic intent – the development or increase of choice and self-responsibility amongst those to whom it is directed.

TOM DOUGLAS