

# 2025 IASWG Virtual Symposium

*Group Work Now*

**June 11 – 13, 2025**

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## Contemporary Innovations in Teaching Group Work Internationally: Innovative Ways of Incorporating Group Work into the Curriculum

### Commission on Group Work in Social Work Education

**Presenters:** Carol Cohen, Mark Macgowan, Olga Molina, Joan Pittman, Erum Agha, Erin Nau, Andrew Spaumer and Barbara Muskat



International Association for Social Work with Groups, Inc.

# Welcome to the Roselle Kurland Memorial Invitational Presentation

- *The Roselle Kurland Memorial Invitational presentation was made possible by a gift from the Roselle Kurland Lecture Series, initiated at the Hunter College SSW by Dr. Kurland's family, friends, and colleagues in honor of her years of teaching and leadership at that institution.* This annual invitational session was inaugurated in 2011 at the XXXIII Annual Symposium in Long Beach, California, and focuses on content of special interest to students and new practitioners. Dr. Kurland was a founding member of the Association and long-time editor of Social Work with Groups.
- This panel presentation by an international group of social work educators, who are members of the IASWG Commission on Group Work in Social Work Education, will highlight innovative ways that group work can be taught in social work curricula globally. Session participants will be invited to join in this discussion

# Our Session's Focus and Objectives

- **This session will offer international, contemporary innovations to expand the volume and efficacy of group work training to build competence, as well as the likelihood of graduates to work with meaningful groups in the future.** With growing evidence of the efficacy of group interventions and the delivery of groups in a variety of settings, teaching social group work is as important as ever in social work curricula. It has been recognized both in the literature and through personal observations that there has been a decrease in availability of social group work education and training in social work education.
- **Anticipated Session Outcomes. Participants will be better prepared:**
  - To consider innovative approaches to teaching social group work
  - To appreciate an international perspective on teaching group work
  - To consider ways of infusing social group work principles across the curriculum.

# An Overview of the IASWG's Commission on Group Work in Social Work Education's Purpose, Goals and Related Resources

- <https://www.iaswg.org/commission>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/teaching-group-work>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/standards>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/sparc-program>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/group-work-journals>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/posterpresentations>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/practicing-group-work-strategies>
- <https://www.iaswg.org/media-resource-project>

# Calling all Groupworkers!

We invite you to take a brief survey to gather practices and ideas for infusing social groupwork knowledge and practice throughout the curriculum—including beyond dedicated groupwork courses. Your insights are warmly welcomed!



# AGENDA

- Presentations by speakers
- Questions
- Break out groups
- Discussion
- Survey
- Wrap up

# Experiential Learning Across All Types of Group Work Courses by Dr. Olga Molina

- The experiential method of teaching group work began as a result of social work students not having enough experiences facilitating groups in their field internships. We wanted to provide students with the ability to learn and practice group work skills in mutual aid groups (Molina & Jacinto, 2015).
- Students facilitate mutual aid groups in the classroom on the stress of being graduate students in their clinical year. They take turns co-facilitating the group. Feedback is then provided by the group members and professor. The groups meet weekly for 40 minutes throughout the semester. In Online courses, the students meet through Zoom to co-facilitate the groups.
- There is a final paper assignment for students to analyze the groups.

# The Mutual Aid Model is Used to Teach how to Facilitate Groups

- The concept of mutual aid is central to social work with groups. Mutual aid refers to people helping one another as they work together to develop solutions to problems (Steinberg, 2014).
- The mutual aid model is a psychosocial approach to group work.
- It is a holistic approach that is a strength-based practice.
- The model is based on the belief that we work with groups because of their potential for mutual aid (Molina, 2022).

# The Inclusive Model is also used to Teach Group Work Practice

- The Inclusive Model is a more recent approach developed by Pelech, Basso, Lee, and Gandarilla (2016) in response to the growing diversity and multiculturalism in our society.
- “Inclusive group work practice is an approach that acknowledges, respects, and embraces the diversity that is present in the group” (Pelech et al., 2016, p. 38).
- Diversity is viewed as a strength in group work. It values the importance of supporting members’ differences that can lead to new ways of problem-solving and new perspectives.

# References

- Molina, O. & Jacinto, G.A. (2015). The advantages and benefits of a student mutual-aid group in developing groupwork skills. *Groupwork*, 25(1), 78-92.
- Molina, O. (2022). Mutual aid groups. In L. Rapp-McCall, K. Corcoran & A.R. Roberts (Eds.). *Social workers' desk reference* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp.676-682).
- Pelech, W., Basso, R., Lee, C.D., & Gandarilla, M. (2016). *Inclusive group work*. New York: NY: Oxford University Press.
- Steinberg, D.M. (2014). *A mutual-aid model for social work with groups* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: NY: Routledge.

# Integrating Group Work Skills into Advanced Courses

## *Background:*

- Advanced courses on Group Work Skills eliminated from curriculum due to reduced enrollment and lack of faculty expertise
- Many interventions courses such as CBT and DBT have a group work component and often student practicum opportunities include running “skills groups”.
- Move toward integrating group work skills into existing interventions course; share content with faculty teaching the courses.

## *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Course:*

- Spend 2-3 classes on group work skills with a focus on Mutual aid and Group dynamics
- Possible Readings:
  - Bieling, P., McCabe, R., & Antony, M. (2022). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Groups, 2nd ed. New York: The Guilford Press.
  - [Munoz, R. & Miranda, J. \(2000\) Group Therapy Manual for Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Depression. RAND.](#)
- Experiential classroom activities:
  - Fish-bowl “real play” group: using a thought record
  - Small group “real play” using CBT tools to manage stressors in practicum with a focus on facilitating mutual aid

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# Integrating group work in practicum education

- Background: BSW & MSW have opportunities to practice group work in their practicum education. Many students report no or limited opportunities. With no field experience and limited classroom education on group work, preparedness to emerge as early career professionals is compromised.
- Consequences: 1) Practitioners without adequate skills to address group processes and dynamics. 2) Classroom and field educators less prepared to teach students on group work practice due to their own lack of training.
- Issues: 1) Decline in coverage of group work content in classroom & field settings. 2) Lack of focus on EBP and use of self in group work education. 3) Field instructors' supervision is individual focused vs. group focused.
- Need: 1) Social work programs to collaborate closely with field instructors and agencies to provide opportunities for group work. 2) Opportunities and methods of group work instruction in class.
- Opportunities: 1) Using group work for critical reflections in class settings. 2) Using group work in practicum seminars. 3) Trainings for field and practicum instructors on group work. 4) Continuing education workshops geared towards group work facilitation and supervision.
- Contribution: Social workers with group work skills in addressing worldwide shortage of social workers.

## References:

Baird, S. L., Béres, L., Sanders, J. E., Vito, R., & Lewis, V. (2023). The role of groups in teaching critical reflection on practice to MSW students. *Social Work With Groups*, 47(1), 35–46.

Knight, C. (2017). Social work students' experiences with group work in the field practicum. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 37 (2), 138-155.

LaRocque, S. E. (2017). Group Work Education in Social Work: A Review of the Literature Reveals Possible Solutions. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 53(2), 276–285.

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at CHAPEL HILL

# Enhancing Groupwork Across the Curriculum

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# Introduction

- At Monmouth University
  - BSW students take Social Work Practice with Groups in their first semester of their third year
  - MSW students take Social Work Practice with Groups in their second semester of their generalist year
  - Discussed in other clinical courses
  - Activities with our students

# Other ways to bring group work in

- Modeling group work skills in the classroom.
- Talking about the ways we work in micro, mezzo, macro ways.
- Discussing the concept of mutual aid in policy and community classes.
- Talking about the stages of group development as conflicts arise in group projects.
- Practicum classes as support and process groups.
- Be deliberate



## Principles of Inclusive Groupwork

- Inclusive group work honors, respects, acknowledges, and embraces the diversity within groups.
- Individual identity is complex and in order for members to be fully respected they should be seen as fully themselves.
- The inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging for all



# Reference

- Pelech, W., Lee, C. D., Basso, R., & Gandarilla, M. (2016). *Inclusive group work*. Oxford University Press.

# **Dismantling Colonization in Group Work Course: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Social Work Education**

**Dr. Andrew Spaumer, University of South Africa, Department of Social Work**



- **Introduction:** Why Decolonise Education?
  - Transform educational systems to remove colonial biases.
  - Promote inclusivity, equity, and diversity.
  - Re-evaluate curricula, teaching methods, and institutional structures.

# Defining Decolonisation

What is Decolonisation in Education?

- "Decolonisation is the process of undoing the legacy of colonialism in knowledge, pedagogy, and institutions."
- Reclaims Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Questions dominant Western epistemologies.
- Encourages critical thinking and reflection.

# Decolonising Social Work Education

## Relevance to Social Work

- “Social Work is about Social Justice after all.”
- Enriches curriculum through multiple worldviews.
- Validates experiences of Indigenous and marginalized communities.
- Challenges epistemic injustice

# Group Work and Decolonisation

## Group Work as a Site of Transformation

- Incorporate diverse cultural perspectives in group dynamics.
- Foster critical dialogue about race, power, and history.
- Challenge Eurocentric standards of practice.

# The Role of Critical Reflection

## Critical Thinking for Social Change

- "Whose knowledge is prioritized in your classroom?"
- Empower students to question colonial legacies.
- Link theory with lived experience.
- Foster reflexive practitioners

# Voices That Matter

## Centering Marginalized Voices

- Involve historically oppressed communities in curriculum design.
- Promote Indigenous and Black scholarship.
- Align goals with social justice and democratic values.

# Practical Strategies

## How to Decolonise Group Work Courses

- Co-develop content with local communities.
- Use participatory, anti-oppressive group methods.
- Include Indigenous facilitators and co-educators.
- Assess students on critical engagement, not memorization

# Challenges and Opportunities

## Navigating the Path

- Resistance to change in institutions.
- Need for educator training.
- Opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

# Impact and Transformation

## Transformative Outcomes

- Equip students for culturally responsive practice.
- Shift from transactional to transformational education.
- Build solidarity across diverse groups.

# References:

- Jones, M., Anka, A., Segev, E., Alhuzail, N. A., Mohamed, O., Wallengren-Lynch, M., Cantley, L., vom Berg, N. M., Laver, S., Hammond, L., & Chen, H. L. (2025). Decolonising social work practice field education: A scoping review. *International Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728241303596>
- Tamburro, A. (2013). Including Decolonization in Social Work Education and Practice. 2(1). [https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/29814/1/v2i1\\_02tamburro.pdf](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/29814/1/v2i1_02tamburro.pdf)
- Rozas, L. W. (2023). Liberating Social Work Education Through Decoloniality. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377317.2023.2232018>
- Tarc, A.P. 2023. Decolonial and education (pp. 31–37). *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Elsevier eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818630-5.08011-8>

# Discussion



- Break out groups
- Discussion
- Next steps

# Calling all Groupworkers!

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# To continue the dialogue, join the Commission or contact us:

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