Second Edition

Interactive
GROUP
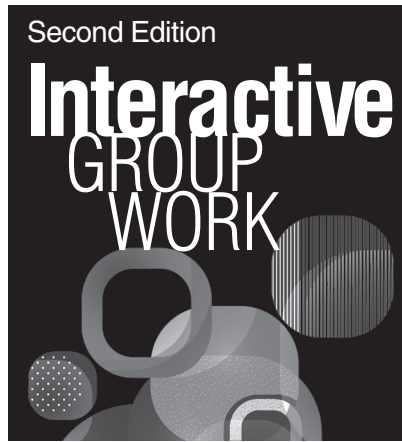# WORK

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William B. Kline

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Dedication

*We dedicate this book to our current and former students
who continue to inspire us to learn and grow from their education,
supervision, and practice of group work.*

*For our practitioner readers, we hope that our book will
stimulate your ongoing growth and development as group leaders.*

*Lastly, we hope that our book will encourage counselor educators
and supervisors to broaden their perspectives about
conceptualizing group process and
the roles of group leaders.*

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Preface

Over 20 years ago, we (Jane Okech and Deborah Rubel) had front row seats for the creation of a seminal book on group counseling and therapy. Our major professor, William ("Bill") Kline, had not only taken on the formidable task of launching our careers as researchers and counselor educators but also signed a contract to create a book that would expand and improve upon prior texts used in training group counselors and therapists. We watched, listened, and learned as Bill guided us through our own group training and also as he labored to communicate his distinct, pure, disciplined, and incredibly useful vision of the potential and reality of groups and group leadership to us, to the other students, and to the reading audience. We were privileged to experience leading groups and receiving supervision for these groups in a way that was thoroughly consistent with Bill's teaching and writing and authentic to Bill as a person, group leader, and scholar. For both of us, this experience was life changing and instilled a lifelong belief in the potential of groups and how they should be structured and led.

As we (Jane Okech and Deborah Rubel) moved on to our own counselor education careers we used Bill's book in both our beginning and advanced group classes. Sometimes it was difficult to fit the content into our institutions' existing group counseling course structures because the book was so direct and focused on group-

specific conceptualization and intervention. Often, we chose to add separate readings to address areas commonly overlooked in group coursework. At times, we toyed with using other texts but always found them filled with information that was not useful or systematic and lacking in information that assisted in the conceptualization of groups and group interventions.

When we used Bill's text, we found that our courses, once liberated from old structures, became highly effective as the foundation for budding group counselors. As I (Deborah Rubel) taught advanced group counseling to doctoral students who had already learned about group work, I received feedback that the book revolutionized the way they thought about groups and assisted them in integrating the bits of disparate information from past learning into a useful approach across group types. As time wore on, we and our master's- and doctoral-level students continued to find the text useful, unique, and substantial.

After a few years, Bill's book went out of print. We and our students still had access to the book in the form of used copies and PDF files, but we pondered why the book had not been used more often and how we could potentially update it and reintroduce it to a larger audience. Thoughts, meetings, plans, plan revisions, outlines, jobs, kids, aging parents, and COVID-19 all happened. Some of these challenges (or "delays") became opportunities as the world of helping and helping in groups shifted in unimaginably dramatic ways, even as it stayed, at its core, essentially the same. This book, in collaboration with Bill and the American Counseling Association, is the culmination of these experiences over time.

Like the first edition, this second edition presents principles, theories, and procedures to help readers develop their understanding of group interaction and begin their practice of group work. Experienced leaders will learn about new ideas that can invigorate and improve their practice, as well as be challenged to "try on" new perspectives and procedures. Novice leaders and students will be challenged to view group work as a distinct and uniquely powerful evidence-based mode of counseling and therapy that stands apart from individual counseling. Both experienced and novice group leaders will find that the perspectives and procedures offered are different from, and offer additional benefits over, what they have learned in their training in individual counseling and therapy.

The perspectives on group work that have guided the preparation of this second edition vary from the perspectives present in most group counseling and therapy texts. First, the principles,

theory, and procedures presented here place the group process at the center of group work. This perspective views the quality of group members' interactions within the group process as the most critical determinant of member change. The centrality of group process and quality of member interactions have several critical implications for group leaders' roles, responsibilities, and actions (which lead to the second set of differences). The centrality of group process and quality member interactions is emphasized most often in counseling and therapy groups but is also significant to psychoeducational and work groups.

Second, although this text positions group leaders as important to group members' learning, change, and therapeutic success, the group leader's impact is characterized throughout as a less direct change and therapeutic agent. The role of a leader is characterized more as a builder and steward of optimal group conditions for change than as a purveyor of group techniques. This differs from most texts. It means that group leaders are responsible for creating and maintaining a learning, change-promoting, and therapeutic environment. This environment supports teaching members communication skills and other tools necessary for interpersonal learning and structures and supports interactions so that members learn from one another and change as desired. This perspective holds that members' interactions, not the individual therapeutic technique of the group leader, provide the medium for learning, change, and growth.

Another set of beliefs that inform this text is a systems perspective and the view that helping groups are social systems. From this perspective, the environment in which the group exists, the composition of the group, the group's goals, the internal and external communication boundaries of the group, and members' issues are all intertwined. As part of the environment within which all groups operate, the sociopolitical realities of power and differences in culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, religion, primary language of communication, national origin, immigration status, and age, among others, affect leadership and member interactions. The implications of systemic interrelatedness include the replication and display of individual, familial, societal, and cultural dynamics within the group and the potential for growth or harm to result.

Finally, this text is grounded in the belief that the principles of group dynamics and theories specific to group should inform leaders' actions. This belief implies that leader actions and interventions

are severely limited when they are not informed by theoretically based conceptualizations of group interaction. Principles of group dynamics and theories specific to group offer new and experienced group leaders information about group-as-a-whole functioning, when to intervene, which intervention to use, and why an intervention may not have been effective. Surprisingly, this emphasis on group-specific theory is relatively uncommon.

This second edition differs from the first edition in several ways. Updated perspectives on diversity and social justice, current research on group efficacy and process, and updated professional frameworks are included and integrated into all aspects of the text. In particular, attention to accreditation standards will enable training programs to utilize this text as a comprehensive resource for entry-level and advanced group coursework. Additionally, extra care is taken in this text to apply the systemic perspective, foundational concepts of group dynamics, and group-specific theory to a variety of settings and group types, including online settings and populations of relevance to counselors.

Organization and How to Use This Book

This updated text includes four parts with several chapters in each part. Each chapter is relevant to both novices and more experienced group leaders. If you are just learning, use the learning outcomes for novice leaders outlined at the start of each chapter to guide your reading and learning efforts. If you are more advanced, use the advanced leaders' learning outcomes to deepen your learning and application of concepts.

The information in Part I helps new and experienced leaders understand groups as human phenomena that occur naturally in a social context, have shared interactive and environmental characteristics, and develop over time. Learning can be directly supported by reflection, discussion, and writing about current group membership and leadership experiences. Learning can also be enriched through reflection, discussion, and writing on recalled past informal and formal group experiences, on group interaction in movies or training videos, or on written group interaction scenarios.

Part II explains three group-specific theories—focal conflict, group general systems, and interpersonal—that each contribute to a comprehensive, integrated, and useful framework for understanding groups and group leadership. The chapters emphasize the types of understanding that are critical to counseling and therapy groups but

are also useful to understanding psychoeducation and task groups. Learning for novice group leaders can be best extended through applying the concepts to group interaction in training videos that use facilitated groups. Learning for more advanced group leaders may be facilitated by viewing video recordings of their own groups and applying the concepts, preferably in the context of supervision.

In Part III, this theoretical framework is translated into concrete leadership and membership skills, ongoing leadership tasks, and intervention strategies for moving groups and group members forward through common challenges. Again, these skills, tasks, and intervention strategies are directly applicable to counseling and therapy groups but also adaptable to psychoeducation and task groups. Novice and advanced group leaders will benefit from extending their learning of these skills, tasks, and interventions by applying the concepts to group interaction in video recordings.

The first two chapters in Part IV integrate all of the foundational learning into the "real world" of groups through a discussion of professional ethical issues. Novice group leaders can support their learning by analyzing group work cases to identify potential ethical dilemmas and apply ethical decision-making models. More advanced group leaders should regularly process the concepts of ethical group work during group planning and supervision.

Part IV also summarizes current research on the effectiveness of groups, introduces readers to common types of groups and settings, describes how groups should be organized and operated, and discusses the importance of leadership personal development and style to the function of the group. It may be helpful to read Chapter 14 on group types and settings earlier in learning—for example, after reading Part I—to become familiar with the broad, real-life world of groups before revisiting it later to deepen understanding of how interactive group leadership is used across group types and settings.

Acknowledgments

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About the Authors

Jane E. Atieno Okech, PhD, is a professor of counselor education and supervision and vice provost for faculty affairs at the University of Vermont. Professor Okech's scholarship primarily focuses on the advancement of proficiencies in the practice of group psychotherapy and clinical supervision with diverse populations. Her scholarly publications in group work and counselor education in general have received multiple professional accolades, including the 2015 Outstanding Article and 2017 Article of the Year awards by the Association for Specialists in Group Work for her collaborations with Drs. Rachel Vannatta, Asher Pimpleton-Gray, and Julia Champe. Professor Okech also received the 2019 *Counselor Education and Supervision* Publication of the Year award from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision for her collaboration with Dr. Rubel. She was designated a fellow by the Association for Specialists in Group Work in 2018 and is executive editor of *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work.*

Deborah J. Rubel, PhD, is a professor of counselor education and supervision at Oregon State University. Dr. Rubel's recent scholarship focuses on examining and critiquing qualitative approaches to research, describing mental health stigma and bias in counseling/counselor education, and promoting group work. She received the 2019 *Counselor Education and Supervision* Publication of the Year award from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) for her

collaboration with Dr. Okech. She was designated a fellow by the Association for Specialists in Group Work in 2017. Currently, she serves as the chair of the ACES Social Justice and Human Rights Committee.

William "Bill" Kline, PhD, is a retired counselor educator and counselor. During his career, he focused on group work and qualitative research, publishing in both areas. His professional service included numerous terms on the editorial boards of *Counselor Education and Supervision* (*CES*) and *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*. He also served as editor and then as associate editor for qualitative research for *CES*. He received the Eminent Career Award and was later designated a fellow by the Association for Specialists in Group Work.