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This book represents another entry into the burgeoning market for textbooks using evidence-based practice (EBP) as an organizing principle in teaching practice. The purpose of this book is to educate group workers in evidence based group work (EBGW) and to “help group workers more effectively achieve their desired processes and outcomes” (p. vii). Although the book is designed as a guide specifically for the education of practitioners who work with groups, it is not limited to the field of social work and includes models and evidence from a broad variety of other disciplines. As a whole, the text is exemplary in that it builds on a thoughtful approach to EBP, a solid knowledge of relevant research, and careful attention to how these factors can be used to improve practice.

Unlike many other texts, where the practice in EBP appears secondary to the presentation of evidence, Macgowan has done an admirable job blending a method for incorporating evidence into practice design and decision making. Readers are guided through a brief history of EBGW, followed by an overview of the process, and proceed through the chapters, which follow a four-part procedure of critical questioning, search, and evaluation. The book is organized into chapters that are devoted to each stage of the process and contain both technical information and helpful examples. Each chapter begins with a helpful diagram, tracking where the chapter falls in the process of EBGW.

The book has a number of strengths. The format is excellent, and the author’s instruction considers the place of both science and practice wisdom. Clear and succinct explanations of complicated issues in research focus on practice realities and needs. Realistic case examples used throughout the book help to flesh out the instruction. Respect for the values and accountability of both practitioners and clients and a realistic focus on barriers (i.e., time, cost, etc.) make this book a balanced presentation of real-life translation of EBGW.

The first chapter covers the historical context and development of EBGW, and an overview of the essential components involved. The author begins the book by stating that “EBGW is defined as a process of the judicious and skillful application in group work of the best evidence, based on research merit, impact, and applicability, using evaluation to ensure that desired results are achieved” (p. 3). The history of EBP includes a welcome discussion of the development across professions, adding a complex element to the standard presentation within the field of social work. If there is a weakness in this text, it is perhaps that Macgowan’s enthusiasm for EBP in general and EBGW in particular causes him to somewhat overstate the acceptance of the model in both medicine and social work and to positively appraise the potential for translational implementation of EBP despite lack of conclusive evidence supporting the assertion. However, this enthusiasm is hardly unique to this text and can pretty much be applied to all texts and writings advocating for this perspective.

Chapter 2 focuses on the important task of formulating an answerable practice question, and introduces readers to the MAP or Methodological, Answerable, and Practical question. This geographical idea of asking the question is oriented by a similar COMPASS or Concepts, Methodology, Publication, And Search String concept to evaluating evidence later in the book. Comparing the MAP process to other similar orientations, the author explains the importance of prioritizing questions, making them relevant to the practice setting, and making them easily and quickly answerable. Cogent examples are provided in a table, and in several other instances.

Chapter 3 covers the search for best available evidence. This chapter is filled with detailed information about how to form search terms, how to identify sources of information, and touches on “information anxiety—the frustration that occurs when there is a great deal of information, but it does not tell us what we need to know” (p. 31). The hierarchy of evidence is explained in such a way that no type of information is treated derogatorily, but rather the strengths and weaknesses of each are presented. This is the clearest and most judicial explanation that we have encountered in the literature. Many examples are provided throughout the chapter, explaining how to look, where to look, and what to look for, and a table of Web sites containing research information is provided, along with instructions for accessing different types of information.

 Chapters 4 and 5 use the Straus, Richardson, Glasziou, and Haynes (2005) practice model to orient the process of critical review and application of evidence and evaluation of practice use. There is a clear and empirically supported explanation of the types of research biases and discussion of rigor and impact. Guidelines are presented for the evaluation of different types of evidence, with repeated cautions to carefully consider the context in which the evidence will be used, and to never resort to directive or cookbook practice. A decision tree is provided to help identify the correct type of evidence being evaluated and the correct type of guideline to use for its evaluation. There is discussion that identifies “practice evaluation, not clinical research” (p. 172) and emphasizes the “smaller emphasis on controlling for rival explanations... and (providing) evidence that the intervention or strategy was responsible for change” (p. 172). Chapter 5 closes with a discussion of setting goals, evaluating outcomes, and documenting the process, oriented toward the practice of group work. Once again, many examples are provided throughout the chapters.

The final section of the book is oriented toward the advancement of EBGW. This final, short chapter identifies several areas where research evidence is minimal or lacking, discusses organizational and educational support for EBGW, and identifies some of the pedagogical issues. Each of these discussions is clearly explicated and supported by research evidence and the author’s own experiences as an instructor.

Overall, this book is well-organized, provides excellent examples and technical instructions, and respects the values of the practice setting as well as the barriers that practitioners often face in the realities of practice. The MAP and COMPASS techniques are clever and memorable, and his instructions in each phase of the process are written with the practitioners in mind. This book would make an excellent text for graduate social work programs, not only for the teaching of group work but for instruction related to the process of EBP in all settings.

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