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8

SUSTAINING GROWTH IN GROUPS

Working out disagreements, making decisions and addressing barriers to participation are ways of building cohesion and strength within groups and individuals so that they continue to grow and develop. This chapter looks at different ways to enhance communication and shared decision making that can create positive group work experiences that enable young people to enjoy, learn from and effect changes in their lives.

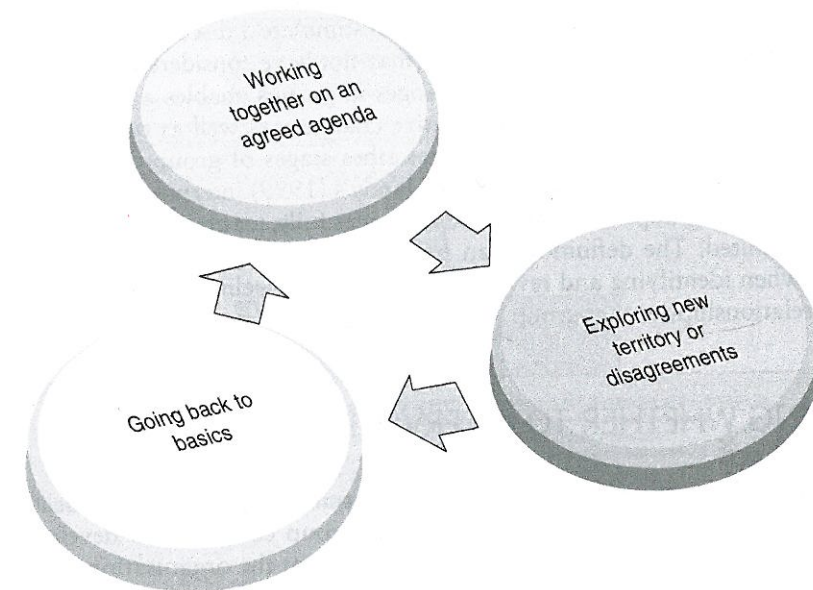
RECOGNISING GROUP PROCESSES

An understanding of group processes can assist a youth worker to recognise when to intervene in a group and when to step back. Some examples of group functions and how they might be tackled to support positive relationships are provided throughout this chapter, for example establishing agreements, making decisions, working with conflict, challenging attitudes and practices and reviewing group development and progress. The simple group process illustrated in Box 8.1 shows a cycle of debate and discussion that characterises most functioning groups. For some groups, the cycle can be smooth. A group may come together around an issue, question or interest and begin to establish the 'basics', i.e. their way of working by defining options or making planning decisions. The group may become more cohesive as new experiences are shared together. 'Bonding' may establish the group so that group members can confidently explore new territory or experiences, even when disagreements are part of their journey. When necessary, they can go back to group 'basics' to discuss how the group should work, roles

and planning decisions, which enables them to review what took place and take on further new challenges. Returning to the 'basics' provides a reminder of group aims and purpose, an opportunity to make sense of any differences, incorporate any learning or simply find some basis of agreement. Some groups continue this cycle with minimal intervention.

Other groups or experiences may face or provoke greater fragmentation and disagreements. Members may respond to new ideas at different rates so that any new territory brings a greater challenge to the group identity. New experiences can expose uncertainty and conflicts. These groups may need to go 'back to basics' with greater frequency – perhaps every few minutes or every few sessions – to discuss 'ground rules' or their interactions. The group can then settle into working together to identify what the differences are or what the next steps should be. Working together may give them greater confidence or allow them to progress so that they can explore different perspectives in the next round of the cycle.

Box 8.1 The functioning group cycle



Poole (1981) likens group process to intertwined threads developing at the same time but at various rates. When the group is involved in the analysis of problems and solutions, gathering information and choosing solutions, a 'task thread' is being followed. When the issues and arguments are focused on the content of

the group activities, the group is following a 'topical thread'. Concerns about interpersonal relationships between the group members means the group is concentrating on a 'relational thread'. 'Breakpoints' occur when a group switches focus from one thread to another through normal changes of topic in the conversation, adjournment or postponement, delays caused by going back over previously settled matters, or disruptions caused by conflicts or failures in communication. When the group develops in a coordinated way on all three threads at once, problems are identified and addressed. When the threads are not coordinated and the focus shifts repeatedly, an analysis of the process may assist the group to progress.

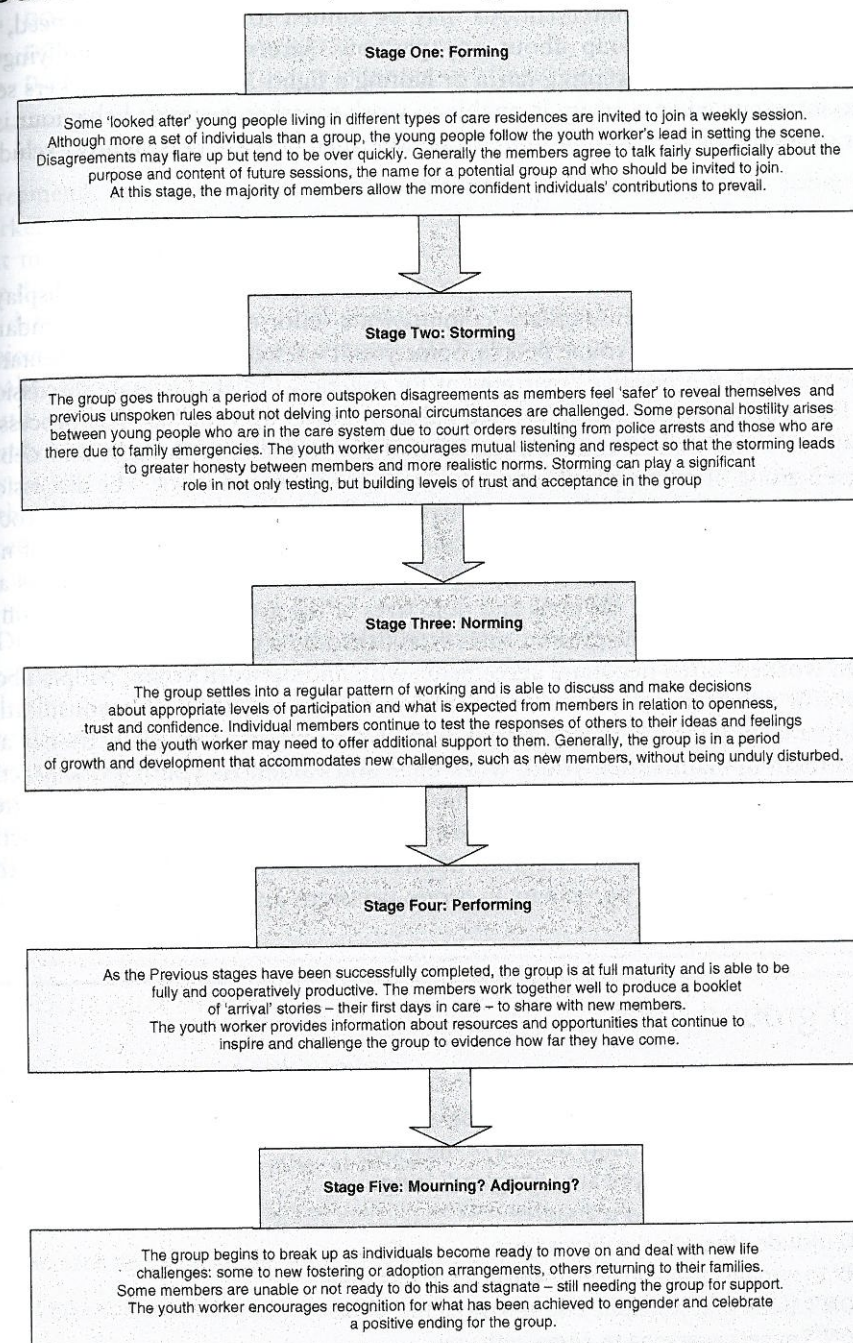
When changes occur, such as when challenges are made or new ideas are discussed, a group can be less sure about what to think or expect and has to explore new territory. This period can include great creativity, confusion and conflict. A youth worker may simply observe group changes and development, which is often an ongoing feature as new members come and go. Alternatively, the youth worker may provide a 'nudge' into the next stage or part of the cycle so that a group does not become 'stuck'. A residential, for example, could be used for a group to explore new experiences and territory together, or to have a meeting to discuss basic group functions and plans. Group interventions could include providing suggestions for the next stage, initiating opportunities for a change or facilitating an exercise to move a group on. Proactive youth work, such as finding out about interest in a new activity, allocating some funds for a day trip or bringing out some materials to stimulate a discussion, can motivate a group to take on a new challenge that they may not have considered previously.

Being able to identify patterns and changes in groups enables a youth worker to anticipate development and support positive change – as well as to decide when or whether to intervene. Tuckman (1965) describes stages of group development that typify cooperative teams (see Box 8.2 for Handy's (1999) interpretation of this). His theory was that if groups did not explore the stages fully, teamwork and achievements would be limited. The definitions can provide a useful framework for a group to consider when identifying and reviewing how they are feeling both about the group and the relationships in that group.

DECIDING WHETHER TO INTERVENE

Many youth workers will look out for opportunities to contribute ideas, assist negotiation or support individuals so that the group continues to develop. Some only intervene when asked or when information about the organisation needs to be shared. Others work more intensely, encouraging members to participate in project development and drawing out the quieter members. A group of young people that works well together knows what to expect from each other and from a youth worker so that relationships of trust can develop. Deciding when to intervene in a group depends on a range of factors, including the individual worker's style (see also Box 4.1 in Chapter 4) and the context of the group. For example, a drop-in group's relationships with each other and with the youth workers are generally looser than the more team-like bonding associated with a fixed term project, which may also be more closely facilitated by the youth worker. Many youth workers have a light

Box 8.2 Tuckman's (1965) stages in groups



Source: Based on Handy's (1999) interpretation of Tuckman

touch in relation to getting involved in group relationships and development, and tend to encourage participation and sharing of ideas through example rather than instruction. Unasked-for interventions may be limited to responding to need, for example reminding a group about any previous agreements about bullying or oppressive behaviour, preventing harm or halting a fight. Most youth workers see a need to intervene when a group is unable to work together, negative behaviour is in danger of becoming a pattern or more vulnerable members are persistently excluded.

Establishing agreements

Whether group agreements about acceptable behaviour are unspoken or displayed on the wall, most youth workers communicate information about boundaries through their responses to young people. Some youth workers rely on self-presentation and the creation of a positive environment for practice. Others facilitate discussions about issues arising to establish 'ground rules' or group agreements. The process of agreeing 'do's and don'ts' can be a useful tool for stimulating thought and debate amongst a group of young people about how the group should work. The discussions can be used to start a group or referred to regularly as part of the ongoing process of group development. The agreements can play a key role in the induction of new members, fostering group relationships, planning the content of future sessions and establishing and reviewing the aims and objectives of the group (see Practice Example 8.1 for an example of some ground rules established by a group).

Youth workers often negotiate agreements with and between young people about the ways in which a group works and plan activities together. This consultation and cooperation provides young people with a positive stake in the activities and involves them in maintaining youth work aims and values. As youth work practice is informal and participatory, agreements are usually oral rather than written, flexible rather than rigid, and negotiated rather than imposed. Issues and practice are discussed and any actions are agreed upon by consensus. The process means that members understand and participate in group decisions and their implications.

Group 'ground rules'

- **DO** listen to each other
- **DO** allow others time to express themselves
- **DO** maintain confidentiality outside of the group
- **DO** think about what you are saying and doing
- **DO** let others know if you disagree
- **DO** include others in the discussions
- **TRY** to remain calm and don't over-react to comments
- **DON'T** think that someone else will do all the work
- **DON'T** expect everyone to agree with you

- **DON'T** be upset if all of your suggestions are not taken up
- **DON'T** interrupt or criticise
- **DON'T** be aggressive
- **DON'T** ignore other members of the group
- **DON'T** allow others to do any of the above without saying something

Agreements can be useful at different points in the life of a group. Some youth workers always start a new group or project with a discussion of ground rules so that members are included in the identification of how the group will function. The discussions can be used to establish boundaries of acceptable behaviour, such as defining appropriate relationships or interactions between members. A project-oriented group could identify issues related to timing of sessions, coffee breaks, keeping to agreed agendas, and what to do if missing a session. Some youth workers and groups keep the ground rules on display and refer disruptive members to them. More indirect reminders of the discussions and agreements that have taken place can work well with some individuals. Reviewing the guidelines both individually and collectively, especially when new members join, can keep agreements current and is a good basis for monitoring how the group is getting on. A review at the end of a group project can help to identify learning outcomes or group development.

Discussions of issues affecting participation are important exercises for developing a group. The support of the group in condemning certain behaviour and supporting rights to participate fully can be a powerful method of developing young people's confidence. Sharing experiences or opinions about issues such as bullying, abuse and assertiveness can strengthen the bonds between young people. Sometimes the issues have more relevance outside of the group. Young people may face racist abuse at work or their home life could be affected by alcoholism. Having the opportunity to discuss appropriate behaviour can be liberating (see Practice Example 8.2 for an example of a group agreement).

A group agreement

Everyone should welcome new members.

We don't have to agree with someone else's opinions.

We do have to respect each other as people.

We don't use abusive language or bullying behaviour.

We can each decide what we want to talk about in the group.

We all take turns washing up.

The process of establishing guidelines may be more important than the specific outcomes or rules themselves. Working with a group of young people to establish ground rules is a way of enabling participation and raising issues. Discussions about issues affecting participation and ways to address them can enable individuals to express their hopes and fears and establish a group identity. A ground rule may clarify human rights issues such as rights to privacy, to participate, to be free to express themselves or to be free from oppressive behaviour. Drawing up the guidelines is a useful way to discuss feelings about a group or programme and to develop a sense of common purpose. The process actively encourages participants to take responsibility for the direction of the group, the level of challenge taking place and the support that may be necessary (see Box 8.3 for some methods for establishing agreements).

Box 8.3 Establishing group agreements

- Provide a good example for members of the group in relation to listening, negotiating, sticking to agreements and fulfilling responsibilities.
- Facilitate discussions about ground rules.
- Discuss issues such as confidentiality, appropriate behaviour and relationships, rights and responsibilities.
- Ask the group to share their hopes and fears.
- Encourage young people to talk about their experiences of non-participation.
- Have everyone answer the question: 'How could I ruin a session for the members of this group?'
- Ask the group to identify barriers to participation and consider ways in which the group could address them.
- Organise role plays of situations in the group that members have found difficult to handle and discuss ways to address these.
- Promote bonding in the group through team activities, group or line dancing and cooperative games. Healthy relationships within the group enhance regard for others' feelings and rights.
- Review the aims and objectives with the group and talk about what hinders progress in relation to them.
- Break into smaller groups to make proposals that are then discussed in the larger group.
- Provide sheets of paper on a 'suggestions wall'.
- Ask individuals to draw up lists of 'I would like this group to ...' and 'I would not like this group to ...', and then share them.
- Have the group consider their rights and responsibilities as members.

When negotiating agreements with a group, it is important to distinguish any imposed rules made by the venue or organisation from those established by the

group. Drawing up agreements about ways of working may be a useful time to highlight any regulations that already exist due to legal or organisational constraints. Some organisations deny participation rights to someone under the influence of illegal or prohibitive substances or carrying weapons. Fixed rules such as these are often imposed to protect staff and other members. In most organisations, these rules are stated as non-negotiable. Youth work organisations need to look carefully at any rules, particularly in relation to their target groups, to make sure that any restrictions are genuinely required or essential. Unnecessary statements that insult, irritate or suggest negative behaviour are clearly counter-productive and may interfere with good youth work practice (see Practice Example 8.3). A useful way to determine which rules are superfluous could be to consider what, if anything, might happen if a rule was breached or non-existent.

Boundaries to detached youth work?

I find that rigid restrictions saying that I shouldn't work with someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol can get in the way of good practice as a detached youth worker. While I agree that there is no point in carrying out a discussion with a young person who is out of control or unable to carry out a conversation, there are situations where I don't feel I can walk away. I feel that I have to consider the options available before I signpost a young person who needs safe refuge. If a young person is experiencing difficulties with dosage or dealers, I would want them to come to us rather than be deterred. If our target group includes alcohol or drug users, we have to be able to make contact with them. The right time and place to reach certain young people to discuss these issues, such as harm reduction or appropriate housing and health services, sometimes means being in the midst of a group that includes young people 'under the influence'.

RECOGNISING DIFFERENT WAYS TO MAKE DECISIONS

The ways in which decisions are made are part of the process of developing group and individual autonomy. Procedures, policies and practice may be discussed and decided upon by a whole group, part of a group or by one person (see the table in Box 8.4 for some examples of different types of decisions). Ideally, decisions would be by consensus and members would discuss their decisions so that all agree. However, varying levels of confidence and interest mean that not all members will participate in all decisions. A group may not even recognise that their actions are decisions or that individuals have been excluded from the process. Sharing an

analysis of the group's methods for making decisions can provide opportunities for members to suggest improvements to both the process and the outcome. Alternatively, an intervention may be called for if a youth worker notices negative patterns emerging.

Box 8.4 Types of group decisions

Non-decisions	Decisions are avoided, ignored and/or left to someone else.
External decisions	Decisions are made by someone or a body outside of the group.
A leader's monopoly	One person makes the decision.
Minority decisions	A smaller group makes decisions from within a larger group.
Majority decisions	A decision is made on the basis of which option has the most support, despite other views being expressed.
Democratic decisions	All members have an equal right to participate.
Unanimous decisions	Everyone agrees on the decision made.
Consensus	Individual differences are thoroughly explored and negotiated to arrive at an agreement.

A decision-making process can be complex and contain elements of more than one type of decision. A youth worker needs to observe who is participating in discussions and whether minority interests are considered or understood by the group. In some groups, a decision which appears to have been made unanimously may actually have been engineered by a powerful bully or a loud-voiced minority. Dissenting voices, which could help decisions to be fully informed, may not be heard or encouraged. An analysis of membership participation and compliance can assist a youth worker to identify what is really going on in a group and how to intervene.

The process by which a group of young people makes and takes responsibility for decisions can be facilitated or supported by a youth worker. The degree to which a youth worker becomes involved will vary depending on the particular young people and the type of project. While a group of young people left to their own devices could make and learn from the same mistakes as any other group, in a youth work setting, a youth worker observes the process of decision making and will sometimes facilitate, intervene or mediate to move the group on. The aims are to enhance the learning experiences for the group and to make sure that youth work principles are addressed. For example, a youth worker may intervene to assist a group to make decisions with an inclusive approach rather than developing elitist factions or adopting bullying tactics. (Practice Example 8.4 outlines some groups' decisions and the youth workers' interventions.)

Deciding where to go

No decision? Or a decision to 'leave it to someone else'?

A group discussed at length which date would be best for an outing but was unable to agree which option was the best. Eventually the youth worker realised that the group could not handle the conflict or responsibility involved in making the decision and made the selection for them. Over the following weeks, the youth worker helped the group to develop their communication and negotiation skills through smaller decisions about the outing, which increased their confidence.

A minority decision or a unanimous decision?

An experienced group of members said that a particular activity was a good idea and the others 'went along with the flow'. Everyone seemed to agree that this was the best option, although only the more confident individuals contributed to the discussion. The youth worker recognised that the decision was far from unanimous and that a small group had felt pushed into compliance. The worker planned to make sure that sufficient opportunities were provided for the less confident members to participate in future discussions and decisions.

Is this a majority or a minority?

The members of the group discussed the benefits and drawbacks of several destinations and then voted on three options. Option 'C' had the most votes so the group was about to book to go to this destination. Then one member of the group complained that the majority had disagreed with this choice. The group realised that although option 'C' had the most votes, more members had voted for the other options – so the majority of the group had decided *not* to choose option 'C'. The worker used this opportunity to talk about the implications of voting as a method of making a decision and encouraged the group to think about the benefits of more discussions in order to develop a consensus.

A minority option that becomes a majority decision?

A group decided to vote on which residential venue to use. After the vote, one venue had a clear majority (over 65%) but a significant minority of the group supported one of the other options. When the minority pointed out that they would be unable to go on the outing if the majority option was selected, the others agreed to forgo their first choice. The group realised that a majority decision ignored the minority interests. In the end, they reached a consensus to choose the 'minority' option so that everyone could go. The worker did not need to intervene in this discussion and recognised the maturity of this group's development.

Consensus or chance?

A group spent a long time exploring different options and felt that a number of possibilities were viable and of interest. Some options were preferred by certain members of the group, but there was no clear majority. The group decided to select the option by rolling a dice – assigning

an option to each of the possible numbers. The decision to use chance was agreed by consensus. Although the option was selected by 'chance', the method was agreed upon unanimously. Even if their preference was not selected, everyone went along with the outcome. The worker pointed out that this process had worked because members were prepared to be flexible about the outcome.

MOVING DECISIONS ON

Most groups need to experience some form of agreement on process or goals in order to make any progress in planning. The example of a group attempting to plan publicity for an event without having established agreement on how they are going to work or where they are going (see Box 8.5) illustrates how these questions will continue to get in the way of making any further decisions. Rather than progressing through decision-making stages (as indicated in the left-hand column), the group continuously returns to the 'basics' without any real advance to agreement or exploration of new territory. A youth worker may allow these circular discussions to continue or suggest that the group go back to stage one to establish some goals so that the group can progress. Helping a group to move on to make a decision could also include a reminder about time constraints (if applicable) or re-structuring the group by setting up a smaller sub-group to make the decisions. Thinking about the structure of the group can temporarily divert attention away from the questions that a group is finding difficult and is an alternative form of 'going back to basics'. While not recommending that groups always be diverted from difficult decision making, sometimes a break from a broken record is welcome.

Box 8.5 Not making decisions

Possible stages	Examples of incomplete decisions
1 Establishing goals: Okay, should we look at the plans for publicity now?	- Do we need publicity? I thought we were going to have a fun day just for us. - There's no point in planning any publicity until we know what the budget is. - I think we should make a start on what we want to do for publicity – then we'll know how much we need for the budget.
2 Clarifying objectives: So, who do we want to attract to this event?	- Do the numbers matter? It's no good if just a bunch of parents come – isn't this just for kids? - We need more members. Anyone who comes can get word around to somebody who may want to come.

Possible stages	Examples of incomplete decisions
3 Identifying and discussing options: So what are some of the ways you would like to attract people to the event?	- If we use leaflets, it's bad for the environment. - Should we see if we can get something on the buses? - It's a waste of time putting up posters; no one reads them. - I think we should use text messages and blogs. - Let's just have a go at designing some kind of logo that we can use in different ways.
4 Deciding on a way forward: So, what's next?	- Let's vote on it! - Voting's stupid. We don't have to have just one way to do publicity. - All we ever do in these meetings is just argue.

WORKING WITH CONFLICT

Assisting young people to find ways to deal with conflict and disagreement are important areas for youth work practice. Issues of power and control can be difficult areas for young people to comprehend or handle. A youth worker may work with young people to assist them to understand the sources of conflict, to articulate their point of view and to find ways to cope with the reality of inequity. Youth workers can provide young people with opportunities to gain a better understanding of their own ideas and perspectives as well as others' positions. At the same time, a youth worker needs to ensure that their own practice is clear, fair and equitable.

Recognising the difference between conflicts and disagreements can assist young people and youth workers to find ways of working together in groups. When the source of a conflict is a clash of principles, a continuous battle for limited resources or contested power where neither party will back down, resolution is generally impossible and needs to be recognised as such. Unless either or both parties are willing to give up or give away their side of the argument, which is unlikely in a conflict over values and principles, a conflict cannot be 'won'. Progress is generally only possible through avoidance or some form of accommodation, such as an agreement to disagree. In such situations, cooperative working will require an alternative focus away from continued battles over issues that are not possible to resolve.

Disagreements, on the other hand, may be worked out to arrive at some form of genuine cooperative progression. Negotiation, sharing information and improved relations can all help to move participants towards agreement or shared understanding. While a conflict involves opposing principles, disagreements can arise about issues, a situation or a relationship based on a misunderstanding, negative patterns or experiences. These patterns may dissipate with more positive interactions, better communication or different circumstances. Often, the various parties find that their positions are not such polar opposites and manage to find common ground.

LOCATING ONE'S 'DISAGREEMENT COMFORT ZONE'

Youth workers are individuals who react differently to arguments and disagreements. One youth worker with a high level of tolerance may perceive a particular incident as 'usual horseplay', whilst another might sense a potential for a violent outbreak. Some prefer to negotiate a resolution to any arguments that arise, whilst others have a more laissez-faire (leave it alone) approach. Experience and temperament clearly play a part in the type of response a youth worker decides to take, although understanding the sources of conflict (see the table in Box 8.6) can assist the development of a more calm and considered approach.

Box 8.6 Sources of conflict or disagreement

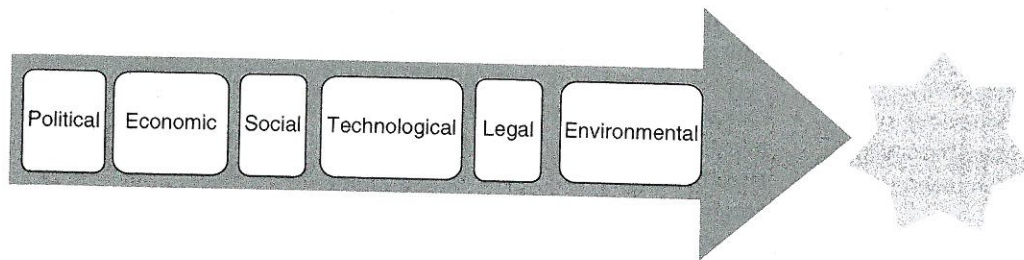
Area of difference	Possible causes	Possible ways to address
Perspectives: groups that refuse to cooperate with each other, individuals that constantly fight	- Conflicts between value systems, religions, ways of life, ideologies, beliefs - A lack of understanding or knowledge of the other's perspective - A history of interpersonal conflicts and disagreements, such as membership of opposing gangs	- Create an inclusive environment that welcomes all values and perspectives - Allow parties to disagree; point out that resolution on certain issues is not possible or necessarily desirable - Identify areas of commonality and don't focus on differences - Explore differences without judgements about right or wrong - Concentrate on interests rather than positions - Discuss the origins and effects of prejudice and stereotypes - Encourage working together on an agreed and common goal
Interpersonal relationships: individuals who don't like each other and refuse to work cooperatively, fighting	- Previous arguments - Differences in style, preferences, interests - Competitiveness - Misunderstanding - Disagreements about decisions	- Encourage members to accept that friendships are not essential for cooperative work - Listen to both sides; encourage them to listen to each other; encourage both to focus on what is being said rather than who is saying it

Area of difference	Possible causes	Possible ways to address
Interpersonal relationships (Continued)		- Identify whether the positions are misunderstood, conflicting or just different - Use ground rules or group agreements to govern the group - Provide alternative activities, such as games, that can build and develop communication between members - Find other avenues for cooperative working, such as physical or artistic activities - Encourage the group to identify and address the issues - Discuss the effects of being misunderstood or stereotyped
Intrapersonal dilemmas: an individual's repetitive negative behaviour, such as withdrawing or domineering	- Individual insecurity or inability to communicate - A history of abuse or abusive relationships - Lack of opportunities to exert power elsewhere - Personal crises or uncertainty	- Use exercises that build up individual confidence rather than expect group cohesion - Provide opportunities for individuals with similar concerns to meet and find common ground - Identify whether the behaviour is a 'cry for help' by providing opportunities for one-to-one conversations
Structural barriers or inhibitors: such as competition over actual or perceived unfair treatment	- Unfair treatment - Unequal distribution of resources or ownership - Lack of transparency about decisions and decision-making; misinformation, different interpretations of information - Organisational culture or procedures	- Clarify procedures and information and find ways to share information and enhance communication - Alter the roles within power structures or assign roles to new individuals - Provide suggestions for changes in the ways that decisions are made - Widen the group's knowledge of opportunities and access to alternative resources - Provide a change of environment or experience to enable change to roles and patterns

THINKING ABOUT EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

An awareness of external forces or influences and how they can affect individual and group behaviour, as well as interactions, can assist a youth worker to anticipate disagreements or physical demonstrations of stress. A range of external events and changes in individual families, as well as in the community as a whole, can lead to disruptive behaviour in a group. A new leader may take charge of a group of bullies; unemployment in the area could increase; a family member may be imprisoned. The effects of these external events can reverberate in youth groups. In organisational analysis, such external changes in political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental issues, coined 'PESTLE' forces (a framework outlined in Thompson, 1997 and illustrated in Box 8.7), demand attention in the form of organisational change and adaptation. In youth groups, the 'PESTLE' forces are similarly significant. An awareness of how external change can influence young people's moods and situations can assist a youth worker to recognise signals indicating that trouble could be brewing – and to take action to address the situation.

Box 8.7 A 'PESTLE' force analysis



DEALING WITH VIOLENT DISAGREEMENTS

Many youth workers are worried about losing control of a situation that turns violent. The possibility that young people in their care or themselves will experience injuries can be a real concern. Anticipating danger is often a matter of 'reading the signs', a skill that develops through reflection on experience. The skill depends on an understanding of the dynamics of conflict, knowledge of the individuals and setting and an ability to recognise the potential for danger. Youth workers need to develop their understanding of situations or exchanges that could inflame an argument, incite violent reactions and deepen conflict. Getting to know young people and their individual 'boiling points' and stresses can take time. Unfortunately, some young people demonstrate their anger and frustrations both verbally and

Responding to a fight

Two members of a group each wanted a turn on the pool table and started a fist fight. Even though the session still had nearly half an hour to run and clearing up usually only took about ten minutes, one of the workers stepped in and shouted at everyone to 'Clear up, it's time to go home – show's over – we can't have any violence here!'. The worker then put a hand on each protagonist's shoulder and said: 'Come on – apologise to one another or I'll knock your heads together – and we'll have to ban you.' This produced some mumblings from both parties. The two did not seem to be hurt and both seemed to be consoled with a free packet of crisps. The groups mostly dispersed and took extra time to clear up so that the session actually finished at the usual time. After the session, the team of youth workers reviewed the session to identify what had taken place. The other youth workers said that they would not have put their hands on the young people or used the same language. The group agreed that a greater presence around the pool table would be useful to review whether the young people wanted to initiate a different system for taking turns. They also discussed some options about what they should do in the future should a fight break out, and came up with the following list:

- Make sure that other staff members are aware of the situation.
- Keep calm.
- Depending on the level of violence and physical strength of the young people fighting, two youth workers might be able to step into the middle of the scuffle and tell everyone to disperse.
- A couple of individuals said that we should ignore the fight as the individuals needed to vent and express their anger. Unless it escalated and lead to injury, some rough play was perhaps harmless.
- When tempers were less high, each party could be asked to calm down and apologise to each other for their bad behaviour.
- Although the group agreed that closing early and exclusions should be avoided if possible, excluding one, both or everyone from the session either temporarily or permanently was a viable option.
- If the fight was not too involved, we could remind all concerned about the centre's ground rules about sharing and non-violence.
- If the incident was serious, a group investigation could be held into what had led up to the violent behaviour – either immediately or later on.
- The two individuals could be taken out of the situation, either together or separately, to discuss a way forward.
- In the slightly longer term, the group liked the following options:

- Initiate some 'anger management' discussions about triggers, consequences and outlets for anger, either in the immediate, short, medium or long term.
- Involve the whole group in a discussion about allocating time on the pool table, the ground rules or which of the above options to take.

ANALYSING THE 'INGREDIENTS' OF AN ARGUMENT

A confident youth worker recognises the benefits of discussing disagreements and conflicts. Although conflict is often portrayed as divisive or dangerous for a group, a good discussion about an argument or a conflict can assist recognition of important issues and help to bring a group together. The outcomes of such discussions in relation to a group or individual may depend on the factors that contributed to the differences being expressed. The discussion about deciding where to go in Practice Example 8.4, for instance, could have erupted and created irreconcilable differences between the young people and the staff. Evaluation and team supervision can lead to issues being handled more confidently. Identifying the 'ingredients' of an argument or a conflict can help to determine its nature and potential for benefit or harm (see Box 8.8 as an example).

Box 8.8 Analysing an incident

If you see an argument between some young people:

- Don't say too much. Listen to what is going on. Move towards the people arguing and present yourself calmly. Communicate with body language, tone of voice and a few words that you are interested in and respectful of the person(s) as people.
- Find out what's going on through observation. Don't ask too many questions and don't say anything unless you really know what's going on. It would be useful to notice:
 - who is involved
 - how they see the situation
 - what seems to be in their way.
- Don't get involved or caught up in the conflict. If you must say something, share your own thoughts or observations, for example saying quite calmly: 'I can see that you are feeling quite angry at the moment.'
- Identify and consider a range of possible options, for example:
 - acting, speaking, responding or doing nothing
 - approaching the situation positively. You could tell them what you would like to happen, for example: 'I would like us all to still be here tomorrow having a conversation about our favourite football team.'
 - getting them involved in a solution, for example: 'What would you do if you were in my shoes?'

- changing the focus slightly: 'Right, so if we focus for a minute on the ideas here rather than the people, what do you think the other person(s) is saying to you?'
- Don't expect the argument to be resolved right away. A lot of arguments have all kinds of elements that may not be immediately obvious. The argument may be temporary or have deeply conflicting roots. Your objective is to enable the participants to express themselves without physical violence. This might be difficult in the short term.

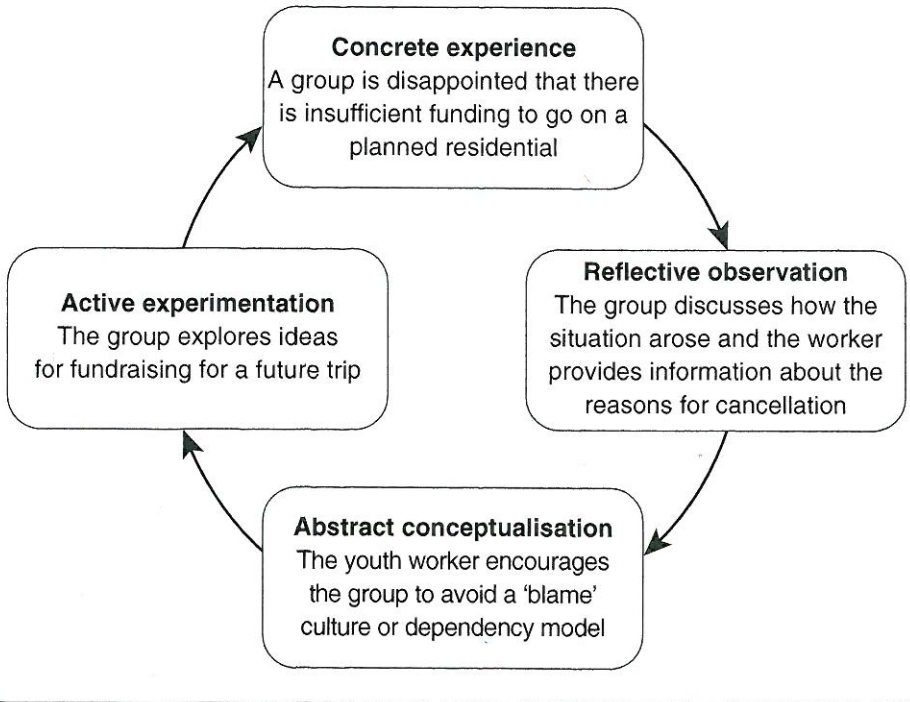
REVIEWING GROUP PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Individual members' learning and group development occurs when a group learns from their experience; recognising these changes can help a group to feel positively about the group. Kolb and Fry's (1975) experiential learning cycle could provide a useful method of analysis of learning experiences whether by a youth worker or the group. Following a new experience, observations and reflections help to make sense of what has taken place. The shared experiences and reflections can help a group to come together. Articulating what has been learned can help to form new concepts for application to new experiences or experiments. In youth work, this could occur through planning, monitoring and review. The role of this process in working out differences, changes and learning can be invaluable in work with groups, whether or not the cycle is referred to overtly. The figure in Box 8.9 applies to Kolb and Fry's cycle to a group's reflection on their planning for a residential that went wrong when members did not identify sufficient funding for their trip.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR DEALING WITH DISAGREEMENTS

- Recognising group processes
- Deciding whether to intervene
- Establishing agreements
- Recognising different ways to make decisions
- Moving decisions on
- Working with conflict
- Locating one's 'disagreement comfort zone'
- Thinking about external influences
- Dealing with violent disagreements
- Analysing the 'ingredients' of an argument
- Reviewing group progress and development

Box 8.9 Learning from experience



FURTHER READING

Chambers (2002) and Rogers (2011b) have some useful tools for establishing ground rules in groups. MacBeth and Fine (1995), as well as Feinstein and Kuumba (2006), provide a range of tools to use with groups in conflict with communities and each other. Hope and Timmel (1984) present training materials to use with groups to enable transformation. Belenky et al. (1986) provide some interesting reflections on the different perspectives of women on learning which may provoke some further thinking about what goes on in groups.