It is generally accepted that personal development forms a core element of the trainee’s journey towards professional competence. However, nowhere is the confusion and ambiguity around the nature of personal development more acutely experienced than within the personal development (PD) group. Rose has produced an essential guide for the trainee on her voyage of discovery. My enjoyment of this clear and flowing text was marginally hampered by the vexing distraction of typographical errors. Nevertheless, this wise and balanced account from an integrative perspective explores the life cycle of a ‘typical’ PD group. Rose begins with issues such as assessment, group size and format, who is in the group, and the role and style of the facilitator. The voyage includes: ‘Setting Off’ (different styles of beginning), ‘Learning to Row’ (disclosure and connection), ‘Undercurrents’ (resistance, ambivalence, absence, lateness and anger), ‘Conflict’ (meaning and acceptability), and ‘Division/Diversity’ (language, race, gender, sexuality, disability and relationship to power). These themes are sensitively explored using instructive exercises and vignettes. In ‘Ways of Understanding’, the PD group is presented as a unique opportunity to explore ourselves in relation to others, which on a micro-level mirrors the systems in which we are embedded.

I read this book having recently completed my training. It has been useful for me in continuing to make sense of the experience. Would reading it sooner have changed my experience of PD? Certainly. But not necessarily for better or worse. Rose has produced a companion for self-awareness and personal development in this most unique of learning opportunities.

James Costello
Counsellor

The personal development group: the student’s guide

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