Global group work: Honouring processes and outcomes

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the Global Group Work Project's action research study to explore and identify essential cross-national and cross-cultural elements of social groupwork practice, and to provide a model for international research and collaboration. It details study methods, process and outcome findings, analysis and recommendations. The key finding of the global themes of being together and doing together in social work groups, as well as the identification of local, indigenous practices contribute empirical knowledge about groupwork's international nature, with implications for teaching, research and practice.*

Keywords: *groupwork (group work); international social work; action research; collaboration; being together; doing together*

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Introduction

The focus of our paper is the *Global Group Work Project's* action research study to explore and identify essential cross-national and cross-cultural elements of social groupwork practice, and to expand international networking. This paper also places the *Project* in the context of international social work and groupwork. We believe that our findings concerning important local practices and global features contribute empirical knowledge about groupwork's international nature, with implications for teaching, research and practice.

We begin with pride and belief in groupwork as a central methodology in the social work profession. The scholarly literature and daily experience of group participants suggest that members and their communities desire the connections promised by collective experiences of social work groups, and that group membership appears central to human experience. Reports of group experience across nations and cultures suggest that a social work group can serve as a *reservoir of power resources where individual participants can get help and receive support.* (Hirayama & Hirayama, 1986, p.124). Over 50 years ago, Lewis Lowy observed that *individuals want to gain satisfactions from group participation; they want to learn and to feel that they are part of a larger whole to which they can make a personal contribution* (1955, p.62). As an enterprise of mutual aid, William Schwartz (1971) placed the source of growth and social action through groups in the membership, and with its dual focus on individuals and communities (Cohen, 2002), groupwork demonstrates application as a tool of social inclusion (Wilson & Quirke, 2005). In these many respects we can talk meaningfully of *the essential groupworker* (Doel & Sawdon, 2001).

However, while the power of groups is indisputable, there has not been large scale research and international collaboration to study local variations and universal themes in diverse contexts, until the *Global Group Work Project* undertook this challenge. The *Project's* overall mission is to advance social groupwork knowledge, education and practice internationally through research, dissemination and collaborative development of globally and locally meaningful groupwork strategies. Within this context, the international partners of the *Global Group Work Project* recently completed a three-year action research project, funded by the International Association of Schools of Social

Work and supported by the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups. Our dual purpose was to:

1. Explore and identify 'global' (universally essential) concepts and practices and 'local' (geographically and/or culturally important) concepts and practices; and
2. Facilitate international networking and collaboration in group-based research and practice methods.

This paper presents the rationale, process, methods, findings, implications, recommendations and future directions of the *Global Group Work Research Project*. Our research methods, including cross-cultural facilitation and data collection from small deliberation groups at a wide range of international venues, have found essential common elements and sophisticated differences in the practice of groupwork. We also highlight the parallel process between the dynamics of our partner group conducting the study, and the experiences of the respondent groups. The study strongly suggests that exploring the interface of global and local elements of groups serves to broaden thinking about teaching and practicing with groups, and has implications for international research. We invite you to approach our *Project* from your own perspectives, and to join international networks developed through the *Project*. We anticipate that this paper will spark thinking about practice, education and research that is useful both locally and internationally.

International social work

At this point, it is important to place the *Global Group Work Project* in the context of international social work, and address three key contemporary concepts, drawn largely from the work of Mel Gray and her colleagues: Universalism, Imperialism and Indigenization (Gray, 2005; Gray & Fook, 2004; Gray & Webb, 2008). Universalism relates to the trend of colonization of global social work practice by western, developed countries. Over the last 100 years, many leaders from North America and Western Europe held the view that social work practice and education was based on a single, common set of principles and practices, regardless of location around the world. Imperialism in

social work is a related concept, exemplified by western social work professionals promoting only their dominant world views over diverse, local perspectives. This oppressive practice assumes that there is only one way to practise, which should be applied universally around the world.

Indigenization refers to understanding international social work by working with people 'where they are' and seeking to understand locally developed and syntonic practices, goals and values that are rooted in the environment. For example, social work practice and education in Malaysia has been greatly influenced by western social work ideology, but social workers there are earnestly trying to learn and incorporate local perspectives that have emerged in the course of community work, and then integrate those values into local social work curricula.

The *Global Group Work Project's* goals are closely aligned with indigenization, and the theme of the 31ˢᵗ AASWG Symposium. 'Honoring our Roots' in this context means learning from the experience of others, broadening global social work development to include all local voices and local responsibility. We are committed to working vigilantly towards anti-universalist, anti-imperialist, and pro-indigenous approaches, by which we can acknowledge and honor both global similarities and local differences. We envision *Global Group Work* as a bridge, a connection that provides a flexible framework for sharing multiple international perspectives.

Methodology

A framing belief of the *Global Group Work Project* is that research is done *with* people – rather than *on* people. Our methods are rooted in groupwork, including both the organization and process of our research team, and the methods of collecting data and analysing of findings. Action research, the qualitative methodology used in this study, is a form of inquiry through which participants reflect systematically on their practice as a means of contributing new knowledge, and researchers adjust the study protocols accordingly as they move forward. It is practitioner-based, collaborative and cooperative. Action research has been historically linked with working with people who were seeking social change (Garvin et al., 2004, p.307). This participatory approach

acknowledges potential power differentials in research methodology and enables joint exploration of theoretical knowledge and knowledge from practice and experience (O'Brien, 1998; Healy, 2001). Other types of action research include community-based, feminist, action learning, and empowerment evaluation, which vary according to the functions of the participants and researchers and the ways in which the goals of the research process are achieved. (Alliance, 2010).

The participatory action research cycle of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and revising throughout the data gathering process gives participants and researchers opportunities for open discussions, group identification, and sharing information and experiences (O'Brien, 1998). Jacobson and Rugeley (2007) conceptualize participatory research as social justice-oriented groupwork in their discussion about their USDA funded project, *Finding Solutions to Food Insecurity*. This orientation connects to knowledge development, education and informed action. They emphasize the social work profession's 'rich heritage of social investigation that includes participatory research practices,' and trace this history to Jane Addams, calling the research method 'fundamentally a group work process.' (pp.24-25). Another example from the social groupwork world is the Wakefield Project, which sought both to establish a major groupwork service in participation with large groups of practitioners and to evaluate the process as it unfolded (Doel and Sawdon, 2001)

Through the development of the research methodology, the international *Global Group Work* research team encountered some interesting differences lying beneath commonly used terms. We consider the research team's processes in more detail later, but the differences in the interpretation of *action research* are illustrative of our general theme. For some in the team, *action research* was synonymous with *participatory research*, while for others the term action research was a more specific term in which the research itself changes the social reality (Shaw et al., 2010), and those who do the research also do the action (Dick, 2007). These differences – in the interpretation of *action research* – are not in themselves problematic as long as they are made explicit, as they were with the *Global Group Work* team; it is when there are implicit assumptions of sameness that difficulties can arise.

The qualitative study conducted by the *Global Group Work* partners obtained information predominantly from social groupwork

practitioners and educators, along with other social work and human service professionals, at ten social work conferences and convenings over a three year period (2006-2008). Sessions took place in Germany, Italy, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom and the United States. As the following Table indicates, the number of facilitators ranged from 1-5 and participants from 5-50.

Table 1
Global Group Work workshop venues

1.   27th International Symposium of AASWG, Oct. 2005 (Minneapolis, US); Facilitators: 3; Participants: 30
2.   28th International Symposium of AASWG, Oct. 2006 (San Diego, US); Facilitators: 3; Participants: 20
3.   Mental Health Committee of DPINGO Affiliates to the United Nations, March, 2007 (New York City, US); Facilitators: 2; Participants: 20
4.   Conference of European Schools of Social Work, IASSW & IFSW, March, 2007, (Parma, Italy); Facilitators: 3; Participants: 7
5.   50th Anniversary Conference of Wurzweiler School of Social Work, May 2007, (NYC, US); Facilitators: 1; Participants: 5
6.   29th International Symposium of AASWG, June, 2007 (Jersey City, US); Facilitators: 3; Participants: 20
7.   Association of Caribbean Social Work Educators Conference, June, 2007 (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago); Facilitators: 1; Participants: 11
8.   European Groupwork Symposium, September, 2007 (York, England); Facilitators: 3; Participants: 20
9.   30th International Symposium of AASWG, June, 2008 (Cologne/Koln, Germany); Facilitators: 6; Participants: 50
10. 34th Biennial Congress of IASSW, July, 2008 (Durban, South Africa); Facilitators: 5; Participants: 22

The research participants were recruited through a convenience, opportunistic sample, with the participants making a choice to attend the workshop described in their conference programs or organizational invitations. Ethical issues and standards of the study were addressed through the Adelphi University (New York) Institutional Review Board.

According to O'Brien (1998), one principle of action research is the dialectical critique, where the social reality of those involved is shared through language and through dialogue; elements are seen in

relationship to one another or in opposition to one another. A second principle is that participants are co-researchers and 'each person's ideas are equally significant as potential resources for creating interpretive categories of analysis, negotiated among the participants' (p.6). Some of these core principles of action research can be identified in the administration of our research. For example, we collected the data for this study in structured workshops using small group variations and exercises framed by opening and closing activities. Most sessions began with asking each participant to contribute a word that encapsulated their experience of social groupwork. After sharing these words in a variety of languages, participants engaged in an activity to identify the people in the room that were most geographically distant from them. Through this process, trios of participants formed and deliberated on items they thought were essential in their groupwork practice. The trios were asked to identify common or possibly global elements (those that everyone agreed upon) and unique or possibly local elements (those that were not shared, but thought important by at least one group member). Then, combining into second-level, larger groups of 6 or 9 members, participants were asked to reconcile their lists of local and global elements, and put together a new list of common and unique elements from those originally identified. Finally, with all participants back in a single group, we asked the second-level groups to share their lists, and all participants to collectively reflect on the process and engage in a closing activity. Following the session, the lists were inventoried and analyzed, and qualitative findings of the workshops' content and processes were examined for similar and dissimilar themes.

In addition to the structured workshops for data collection and analysis, narratives by individual group facilitators were written to record their reflections on the sessions. This documentation of the parallel process provided another source of data, informing and enriching both the content and the process of the research study. This process further illustrates the 'reflecting' phase of the participatory action model (O'Brien, 1998).

Some of the limitations of the study were the varying levels of expertise and experiences of the participants, and that most of the workshops were presented in English only, although participants used their language of choice in the word exercise of the opening activity. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, the participants were self-selected, and

had the opportunity and resources to choose to attend a conference or organizational meeting.

Process findings and analysis

In this section, we focus on the narratives of the research process, and share how the process of the research yielded rich and sometimes unanticipated findings. As already mentioned, at the beginning of each workshop participants were asked to contribute one word that captured what groupwork meant to them. This word was reviewed and sometimes changed by the same participant at the end of the session. This activity acted as an ice-breaker and a bench mark for identifying outcomes. We felt that it was important to encourage participants to use a word in the language of their choice. This was also a way of engaging participants in the process of recognizing commonalities and differences.

It was essential, we believe, to spend time at the beginning of the session to give information about the research and to summarise the work undertaken to date. We believe that the first point of contact with the group must include an exercise in clarifying values. Not only is this good groupwork, but it also provides an opportunity for discussion about ethical issues that arise in the research. Participants were made aware that they would have an experience of groupwork, while also contributing as subjects in the research. In some instances this was different than their original expectations of a didactic presentation, and participants had the choice to remain or leave in light of this information. No participants left the session after this orientation to the session.

Participants in the workshops were mostly social workers, and some did not consider themselves groupworkers. It was important to afford them the opportunity to choose their point of entry into the research process. As a result, we found that participants at groupwork symposia engaged most readily with the data gathering process. Subjects from non-groupwork traditions had different expectations and therefore needed more time and active facilitation to encourage their participation in the data gathering process.

We found that sequencing was an important factor in promoting engagement with the research process while providing a positive

groupwork experience for participants. In terms of timing, we found that the workshop was most useful in promoting international networking if scheduled towards the beginning of the programme, since the workshop served to build group relationships and effectively set the scene for engagement with the conference overall. Another finding concerned the process of conducting the research within a limited time in a conference programme. We know that the time constraints were often a concern to participants, and we continue to explore the question of the extent to which it had an impact on the quality of the work undertaken and the depth of the findings.

While not explicitly instructed to do so, participants often shared their educational background in social work. It appeared that course content is influenced by national traditions which reinforce the dominance of a particular social construction of reality. This determines the range of social work practice interventions taught and ultimately has an impact on constructing dominant forms of service delivery. For example, in the United States, where groupwork is most often delivered as an integral part of social work education and training, the findings showed that it became part of participants' skills sets. In contrast, in the European Union, groupwork tends to be viewed as a specialism, unique, and standing alone; it was also sometimes available as a separate and additional qualification, usually at post qualifying level. Another issue that arose through workshop discussion concerned the process of constructing professional identities, and who is responsible for their definition. Participants shared diverse experiences of the roles played by educational institutions, professional associations, work contexts and self-perceptions in the formation of their professional identities.

The workshops also provided extensive data regarding how needs are articulated and how group interventions are framed in the field. The research found that responses, and perhaps world-views of respondents, tended to be more individual (as in *membership criteria* and *every group is different*) or more collective (as in *network* and *relationship*). Descriptions of interventions appeared to be influenced by dominant discourses (as in *social justice, cultural diversity,* and *professional leadership*), and thus determined the range and possibility of social work practice interventions.

In all of the venues/contexts in which the research was carried out, English was the principal language used. Where it was not the first

language of most participants, translation facilitated the process of data gathering. Regarding *Global Group Work* workshops in the European Union, the language of communication was English and this was made clear at the outset, but informal (Parma) and formal translation (Cologne) was used. In Cologne, one young American commented (in wonderment) on this experience in the workshop with the remark: *This is the first time I've been translated*! We feel that we could have done more in inviting the use of other languages, especially in the US, where there was little formal recognition given to other languages. The AASWG also appears to be increasingly aware and concerned about this phenomenon, moving to a more inclusive approach to languages.

Facilitation was a key issue throughout the research process as both a means and method of conducting the research. Facilitation between the various 'actors' (i.e. the *Global Group Work* partners) engaging in data collection in a variety of locations, required ongoing reflective dialogue for critical review and revision. In order to maintain coherence it was necessary to accommodate the diversity of facilitation styles while processing the needs arising from the research participants. Facilitation of ten workshops, with a range of partners and participants required creative responses from the research team to ensure that those engaged in conducting the research did so in keeping with the overall aims and objectives of the project. This also required reflection post-group and ongoing consultation by telephone and email.

In workshop sessions where participants designated themselves as social workers/social pedagogues, their approach to the research process included an interrogation of the researchers about process and outcomes. Questions posed to us included: *how do you think it went?, how did we do?,* and *what do you think?* Participants asked for feedback and evaluation on performance, and in this process engaged the researchers in dialogue. This changed the dynamic of our roles from outsiders to insiders and required more active facilitation. In contrast, when participants identified themselves as groupworkers, a different facet of group behavior was apparent. Participants actively engaged with the task from the outset and 'knew' how the process would unfold. They were in a position to trust the process and just got on with it! In terms of roles, the researchers remained on the outside of these groups and participants took increasing ownership of the research process. This difference at this level was summarized by the comment: *One word is not*

enough for me! I could own all those words [on the wall]; *they all belong to me.*

Outcome findings and analysis of common and unique aspects of *Global Group Work*

As already demonstrated, our research findings include data regarding the process of group facilitation, small group dynamics, decision making strategies, worker orientations, environmental constructs and group research development, in addition to data regarding our central questions about global similarities and differences in social work with groups. Clearly, we found more than we were explicitly looking for, and much more than we expected. This section focuses on specific findings related to deliberations of the small groups in itemizing common and unique qualities of social groupwork.

In order to set the stage, a brief review of the process of small group deliberation is useful. As we have already described, after individually sharing an opening word in one's own language to characterise groupwork, participants formed the most geographically diverse trios possible. In the trios, members shared what was essential in their practice of social groupwork and most of the identified items fell in categories of strategies, skills, interventions, techniques. At the first level of the trio, participants agreed on what was common and different among them. Three examples of the lists made by trios of common elements are:

> Example A: *Working with conflict, Fun, Purpose is critical, Experience being 'the other'*
> Example B: *Groupworks itself, Members giving and accepting feedback, Emotional release*
> Example C: *Use of activity, Education as part of groupwork, Keeping numbers manageable*

In the next stage, when two groups (or sometimes, three) combined for a group of six or more, they were charged with reconciling their lists by consensus. At that level, few items were considered common after the reconciliation process, and those that were listed as common and essential to all groupwork practice were primarily those that we identified as values or meta-themes, such as *passion for groups, social*

change, group as microcosm, understanding culture and context, activity and *mutuality and relationship.* In our analysis, we looked first at items that we categorized as strategies and techniques (such as *working through conflict, releasing emotions, sharing experiences,* and *keeping numbers manageable.* We examined which of these items remained on the lists of combined groups through the deliberation process, and then, we examined combined lists from all ten study sites.

What remained after this process of analysis is perhaps quite surprising. Some of our most commonly used strategies did not survive this full reconciliation process. Altogether, the respondents ultimately did not reach consensus around any single item of strategy or technique, and did not identify any such items as universal. Some may find this disturbing, and our *Global Group Work* team continues to consider this finding in the context of our research process. There are multiple interpretations for this outcome, including possible limitations of the research design. However, in addition to considering such limitations, we interpret this outcome largely as a positive sign of the great diversity in groupwork internationally and cross-culturally. We found that at the level of strategies and techniques, respondents did not agree on the universality of a specific set of skills, and we see this as an important reminder to work towards non-imperialistic and non-universalistic practice.

As noted earlier, while there were no single items of universal agreement, there were items that appeared in numerous reports by the workshop groups. Based on this, our research team made the decision to look at those items, especially meta-themes or values that were identified frequently, but not universally. After reviewing these items, we have attempted to identify broader concepts that encompass the frequently identified qualities. Through this extensive review process, we propose the following two common cross-national and cross-cultural themes: *Being Together* and *Doing Together.*

The first common, global theme, *Being Together*, suggests a sense of belonging to a group, building on ideas about group membership as a context of life. *Being Together* also accommodates ideas about the differences among members and between groups and cultures, and includes strategies related to mechanisms to facilitate joining the group and connecting members with each other and the group as a whole. The second theme, *Doing Together*, is also related to group participation as a part of life, through action undertaken in the group. *Doing Together* does

not mean that members do the same thing at the same time (although they may), and focuses on members acting in ways that are related, but not necessarily simultaneous or synchronous. Concepts and strategies of activity in groupwork are included in this theme, as well as strategies that relate to what our team sees as *interplay*, or the inter-relational aspects of action and activity in the group.

In order to explain these themes further, it may be helpful to look at two widely held concepts that were not identified as universal in our study. First is the initial strategy of *establishment of a collective purpose*, a near-sacred concept in North America. We contend that *establishment of a collective purpose* is a critical, but ultimately local strategy for helping groups to coalesce and *be together* in geographic or cultural contexts where individualism is a predominant ideology. In contrast, in places where there is a predominantly collective oriented culture, the groupwork strategy of *helping members find their own voice* is seen as a very important local (but not universal) concept in the early phase of group formation. These examples highlight the importance for all of us to look beyond our cherished strategies, and to step back and consider the processes we hope they will set into motion. Globally, we believe that each locale and culture develops a particular set of skills that best meet the needs of members and specific communities. We recognize and share the difficulty in reconceptualizing our skill sets as local or indigenous strategies to actualize *Being and Doing Together* in groups, yet that is what our study and the current literature in international social work suggests.

Observation, analysis and narrative of the parallel process

In this section, we focus on the parallel process that we have experienced as a result of our ongoing involvement in the *Global Group Work Project*. We begin by noting that we are often asked a set of similar questions in the many locations in which the research has been conducted. They are as follows:

· How did such a diverse group of people/facilitators come together?
· Is it possible to identify and reflect upon the parallel processes at work?
· How do we continue to develop and sustain ourselves over such a

long period?
· Can we capture and share the narrative of the group research process in action?

Some of us met initially at the annual Symposium of the AASWG in Denver, Colorado in 1999. We found ourselves together enjoying, in what later became one of our mantras, *professional fun*. From this genesis of conviviality, the decision to work together was taken and our group expanded over the next few years. This process encapsulates the essential elements from the findings, that of *Being and Doing Together*.

Regarding the second question, the possibility and efficacy of looking at the parallel process, we feel that our research team reflects many of the process and outcome themes found in the small groups in the workshops. Our stated purpose was to contribute to international groupwork research in order to profile and reclaim social groupwork's role as a principal method of social work for education, training and intervention. Participants engaged in a single workshop event in which the processes of giving and receiving became integral components of the experience in keeping with the ethical perspectives of the research team. Just as the workshop groups discovered their strengths, our research team discovered that our strengths, values and different styles of working were significant in accomplishing our tasks and building cohesion. We found that there needed to be a *fit* between how we practised as groupworkers and how we carried out the research. Good groupwork practice became a focus and the means by which we continued to organize and deliver the research process. The reflective component dictated by participative action research posed challenges to the cohesiveness and creativity of the research group, while remaining central to shaping *what, why and how* to achieve the objectives of the *Global Groupwork Project*.

The development and sustainment of our group merits further discussion. In addition to the enjoyment that we gained from being together, it emerged very early that we held shared values, briefly summarized as a commitment to social justice and inclusion. We have a shared view of social work as having a responsibility to challenge dominant discourses, and give voice to alternative voices. This perspective is predicated on the notion of on-going professional development and the valuing of lifelong learning in the personal, professional and global spheres.

91

C.S. Cohen, M. Doel, M. Wilson, D. Quirke, K.A. Ring, S.R. Abbas

Group composition is an important element in the success of the *Global Group Work Project* research team. In order to understand this we believe that it is necessary to identify some commonalities binding the group. All members of the group are members of AASWG, and a majority have presented and attended its Annual Symposia, thus fostering the connections for the collaboration. All members of the group are professionally qualified social workers. Areas of practice represented by members cover a wide diversity of contexts in the non-governmental and statutory sectors, including learning disability, family support, children services, youth and community work. All members of the project are also social work educators and trainers. We share a belief in the importance of groupwork as a method of social work education which we promulgate in our teaching, practice and research.

The research has contributed to an expansion of our world reach and we have become globetrotters as a result. The opportunities to carry out the research in a variety of locations and contexts around the world gave us permission to travel and, therefore, direct opportunities for critical dialogue and reflection with others. We believe this process is central to developing the discourse of international social groupwork practice. An outcome from these experiences is an enhanced national and international profile of research group members, significant in this era of greater scrutiny and accountability.

The challenges inherent in collaborative ways of working (doing together), informed new ways of being and doing for the researchers. The collaboration paradigm that emerged required on-going communication and assigning equal value to process and outcome. In the doing we re-discovered an 'old' model based on parity of esteem, working to strengths and valuing diversity; dynamics that were modelled in our approaches to the research populations. In our experience, cultural and other differences that are apparent, such as skin color or religious affiliation, appear to be relatively easy to recognize and accommodate. With less obvious cultural differences, the possibility for conflict, miscommunication and misunderstanding is greater. These subtle differences were often evident in our use of an apparently *common language* (such as with the meaning of *action research* described earlier), and we made a concerted effort to seek clarification when the need arose. We had a strong commitment to

parity of esteem in honouring the various dialects in the process.

Power is a constant issue in collaboration and requires on-going interrogation. In any collaborative endeavor, there will be differences in terms of leadership styles, power, culture, roles and responsibilities, communication and the ways in which conflict and uncertainty are managed. The most obvious differences are that members of the research group come from different countries and continents, cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds. We have been asked: *What are the implications, benefits and challenges of working in this diverse group?* In response, we can report that it was up to us to choose to ignore or explore our differences. We chose dialogue and critical conversations about our own experience as a research team – debriefing, immersing ourselves in post-workshop reflective writing, mutual exchange, and new dialogue through technological media as well as face-to-face.

This process enabled us to build and sustain the research group while fostering adherence to our core values. One of our central practice issues is how to build trust between people who have not previously worked together. In order to be inclusive and encourage new ideas some prior knowledge and experience of being "other" is an important factor in the decision to co-work, as is being able to accommodate difference in leadership style. The value of bringing these ingredients and skills together is that new possibilities and networks result. Risk taking was a necessary part of this process. From it we found a community of interest and care. Through sharing our vision we experienced the support to examine, understand and overcome conflict and difference. This proved to be a valuable experience for facilitation and has enabled us to make a 'grounded' contribution to scholarship, knowledge building and practice wisdom. In essence, we charted new ways of *being and doing together.*

Implications and recommendations from the Global Group Work Project

In this section, we look at the implications of the research in three areas: Practice, Education and Research. Regarding groupwork practice, our study findings raise the central question of: *What is a groupworker?* The diverse responses from the *Global Group Work* workshops suggest that

there is not one, single method of defining or practising groupwork, nor a single groupwork identity. The research also has implications for how groupwork practice should and could be supervised. Participants reported highly divergent supervisory practices, ranging from nothing at all to mentoring and co-working, suggesting both informal and formal supervision as an area for further inquiry and development. Our research indicates that we need to ensure that the forms of supervision are indigenous, while honouring our roots and beliefs about groupwork supervision. In addition, the findings direct our attention to question what peer support could be available for the supervisors as well.

Also, coming from our qualitative analysis of the data, comes the notion that groupwork practice has something important to contribute to ideas about *social capital*, highlighting social groupwork's potential to bring communities together, in which the sum of the whole is greater than the parts. This is not a new idea in social work, and the groupwork contribution to social justice and change merits further attention.

We have earlier emphasised the importance of local context. Our analysis suggests exploring this context at an even more localised level – that of individual organizations and institutions. Questions along this line of inquiry include:

· What role can we play in helping make organizations become more responsive to groupwork?
· How can we influence the way groupwork is perceived by social work educators, by the agencies in which social work placements occur, and more widely in the local cultural context?
· How is groupwork perceived by students and practitioners – as core or an add on?
· How can we reveal and highlight groupwork's relevance to other activities, such as teamwork, classwork, social and family groups, etc.?
· Are there prospects for some kind of international licensure? (Perhaps based on the AASWG groupwork standards?)
· Can any international quality standards be relevant across countries and cultures, given the findings of this study?

Regarding groupwork education, the research findings raise questions about the level at which groupwork enters the social work

curriculum. Specific findings and the process of workshop deliberations suggest the need to think further about what is needed, and where groupwork education and training might best appear in the social work curriculum. Of critical importance is the need to further examine the interplay between class-based and field-based teaching and learning. We wonder if there are prospects for international collaboration at the educational level (an international groupwork course and award, for example), and ways to enhance continuing professional development in groupwork.

Regarding future research, this *Project* suggests that there is a strong need to move from *anecdote* to *archive*; that is, to build on existing good practice and find systematic ways to publicise the experience of groupworkers and members (such as the groupwork portfolios of practice reported in Doel, 2006). Anecdotal knowledge enriches practice wisdom; whilst this can be of great value, it is accessible to relatively few. In order to broaden global accessibility, it will be important to find ways to *archive*, or collect it into something like an open access, international portfolio that expands knowledge whilst respecting confidentiality.

A number of recommendations emerge from this research. First, the *Global Group Work Project* is committed to help in the process of systematic archiving and dissemination of our knowledge of groupwork practice. The web, including our page at www.AASWG.org, is an important part in this effort, where we have the potential to post data about *Global Group Work* research, and local partner activities. We will be launching the *Global Groupwork Network*, with an international list to promote collaboration, share news of projects, and campaign for group work and the development of its global evidence base.

Second, there is a need for further cross-national, cross-cultural study to develop and refine the findings from this first *Project.* This next phase of work will include the encouragement and dissemination of international reports of groupwork in action internationally, and opportunities to assess how the concepts of *being together* and *doing together* serve in a process of cross-national, cross-cultural analysis and knowledge sharing. Third, in the area of education and training, we recommend the development of cross-national groupwork education modules, which could draw from an expanded collection of literature on international groupwork, and be used in academic, workplace, and

continuing education settings.

Finally, we recommend publishing more cross-national groupwork articles in peer-reviewed journals, since there are remarkably few of these involving people across countries. As evidence, an analysis of the authorship of articles in *Groupwork* journal between 2000-2009 showed that none of the 51 co-authored articles in this period had authors from different countries (Doel, 2009). In general, we wish to encourage and facilitate cross-national and cross-cultural collaboration.

Conclusion

In bringing this paper to a close, we wish to thank the people (over 200) who participated in the *Global Group Work* workshops – without them this research would have been impossible. We also want to acknowledge our colleagues Roni Berger, who co-facilitated the first workshop, and Carol Irrizary and Ingrun Masenek, who have been partners in the *Global Group Work Project*. The International Association of Schools of Social Work funded this *Project* through its small grant program and the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups has been a consistent and early supporter of this effort.

The work of the *Global Group Work Project* is ongoing, and through this research we have begun to build a network of practitioners and educators who are committed to the diversity and power of groupwork internationally. Our study has taught us about working in a group through an extraordinary *in vivo* experience, and has reminded us to stay open and flexible in our relationships with others, in collaborative research, and in practice. Whatever we have accomplished, it has come by *being together* and *doing together*. Our charge, to expand groupwork practice internationally with an expanded knowledge base of local and global elements, is ambitious; we know it is shared by many.

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