

A standards-based inventory of foundation competencies in social work with groups: An empirical test in Scotland

Mark J. Macgowan¹

Abstract: *This paper describes the application and testing in Scotland of a measure of foundation competencies in groupwork, derived from standards for social work practice with groups. Developed by the International Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (IASWG), the IASWG Standards have not been widely used outside of Canada or the U.S.A. A 70-item inventory based on the Standards was developed to measure two domains, how important each item is for successful groupwork, and how confident the respondent is about demonstrating the skill in practice. The first study, with a mostly North American sample, reported excellent reliability and good validity. This paper reports new findings on the reliability and validity of the inventory from data collected from students and practitioners across Scotland (N = 161), and includes qualitative impressions from participants. The results indicated excellent internal consistency for both the importance and confidence subscales, with low standard errors of measurement. An item analysis revealed high respondent ratings, supporting content validity. Significant correlations between the subscales and validators supported the measure's concurrent, construct-convergent, and criterion known-groups validity. The findings suggest the cross-national applicability of the inventory (and the Standards represented by the inventory), while also illuminating areas for refinement.*

Keywords: *Groupwork; standards; instrument development; global group work*

Professor, School of Social Work, Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, Florida International University

Address for correspondence: *Professor, School of Social Work, Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, Florida International University, 11200 SW 8th Street, AHC-5 572, Miami, Florida, U.S.A., 33199. Macgowan@fiu.edu*

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Introduction

Groupwork is a widely used method in counseling across the world (Mayadas, Smith, & Elliot, 2004), and there have been ongoing projects to advance an understanding of global groupwork (Cohen et al, 2012). This 'progressive shift' in social work research and education that incorporates a global perspective invites us to consider how theoretical and practice approaches may differ internationally (Williams & Tedeschi, 2013, p. 165). This is particularly needed in social work organizations that claim to be international in scope. A part of that investigation can be whether practice standards, developed largely in one country, may have relevance in another.

Practice standards and competencies have increasingly been developed by professional groups across the world (IASSW/IFSW, 2004). They are valuable as they (a) outline core competencies and best practice guidelines; (b) are important in the process of recognition of a profession; and (c) can be a bargaining tool for procuring resources for teaching and practice, particularly in countries moving towards professionalization of services (Roy, Pullen-Sansfaçon, Doucet, & Rochette, 2013). There are standards for groupwork practice in psychology (Barlow, 2013) and within professional groupwork associations (AGPA, 2007; ASGW, 2008, 2012; IASWG, 2006; Singh, Merchant, Skudrzyk, & Ingene, 2012). In particular, the International Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (IASWG) developed Standards for Social Work Practice with Groups (Abels, 2013; Cohen & Olshever, 2013; IASWG, 2006). The Standards were developed by experts in groupwork education, practice, and research and 'represent the perspectives of the [IASWG], on the value and knowledge and skill base essential for professionally sound and effective social work practice with groups and are intended to serve as a guide to social work practice with groups' (IASWG, 2006, p. 1).

The IASWG Standards consist of six sections. The first section includes material on core values and knowledge for social work with groups, such as respect for persons and their autonomy and the creation of a socially just society. Sections two through five include knowledge and major worker tasks and skills in each of the phases of practice (planning, beginnings, middles and endings). Section six examines ethical issues for practice with social work with groups. As noted in the Standards,

The phases and the associated tasks described in these standards are guides for practice. They represent the wisdom that has been acquired from practice, theory, and research. However, each group is different and practitioners must apply these standards in terms of their appropriateness for each group and its particular members. (IASWG, 2006, p. 2)

The Standards are descriptive rather than prescriptive and serve to inform groupwork practitioners and educators about basic competencies in social work with groups.

Creating inventories to facilitate implementation of standards

One of the challenges of practice standards is moving them into practice and teaching. For example, the IASWG Standards have been available since 1999 and have appeared in the back of popular textbooks in the U.S.A. (e.g., Toseland & Rivas, 2012; Zastrow, 2012), but surveys have shown that they have been relatively unnoticed by practitioners and educators in the U.S.A. and Canada (Cohen & Olshever, 2010; Sweifach & LaPorte, 2013). One of the ways to help move Standards into practice is to create an inventory, which could be used as a tool to assess learning about the Standards and serve as a benchmark from which to measure progress in learning. Wilson and Newmeyer developed such an inventory based on training standards from the Association of Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 2000; Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). That effort inspired a similar project that resulted in the development of an inventory based on the IASWG Standards (*Inventory of Foundation Competencies in Social Work with Groups*, ICSWG; Macgowan, 2012). The process of moving the IASWG Standards into the inventory consisted of two main stages (more fully discussed in Macgowan, 2012).

The first stage involved creating a set of items directly based on the IASWG Standards and creating the response scale. Items were drawn directly from the 'tasks' and 'skills' dimensions of the Standards, yielding an initial list of 82-items, which would be empirically tested (described below). Examples of items include, 'Invites full participation of all members;' 'Encourages direct member-to-member communication;' and 'Assists members to identify and articulate feelings.' In addition,

a numerical response scale was created, which asked respondents to answer in two domains; how *important* the item was for successful groupwork and how *confident* the respondent was in being able to successfully demonstrate the skill in practice (patterned after the response scale used by Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). The response scale ranged from 1 to 4, 'very unimportant' to 'very important' and 'very unconfident' to 'very confident' in the respective domain (subscale). Importance and confidence are important elements in developing ability in groupwork (Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008) and there is evidence that performance on self-efficacy measures is likely to relate to performance in actual practice (Holden, 1991; Holden, Anastas, & Meenaghan, 2003; Holden, Barker, Meenaghan, & Rosenberg, 1999; Murdock, Wendler, & Nilsson, 2005; Rishel & Majewski, 2009).

The second stage consisted of a series of empirical tests. To do this, it was necessary to recruit participants to complete the inventory. Participants were mostly from the U.S.A. and Canada ($N = 426$) and consisted of students enrolled in groupwork courses in schools of social work and established groupworkers (i.e., those with at least a master's degree and any of the following: ten or more years of groupwork experience, a doctoral degree in groupwork, author of scholarly materials on groupwork, groupwork educator, or service on the Board of IASWG). Once completed by these participants, the inventory was subjected to empirical tests (item analysis, reliability, measurement error, and validity).

First, each item of the preliminary 82-item inventory was examined to determine its importance and contribution to the overall statistical strength of the inventory. Specifically, the established groupworkers' ratings of 'importance' of each item were considered along with the relative item-to-total (statistical) contribution of each item. This item analysis reduced the inventory from 82 to 70 items.

Next, the 70-item inventory was statistically examined for its internal consistency (coefficient alpha) reliability, which was excellent for both subscales. The standard error of measurement (SEM) was also calculated to provide 'an estimate of the range of values in which the client's 'true' score probably falls' (Bloom, Fischer, & Orme, 1995, p. 216). As an index of error, the SEM should be low. For both subscales of the inventory, the SEM was desirably low.

Validity testing included content, concurrent, construct-convergent,

and criterion (known-groups and predictive). As the inventory items were drawn exclusively from the Standards, the inventory had *prima facie* content validity. In addition, the item analysis (described above) ensured that the inventory included only items that were considered 'important' by established groupworkers, further supporting the inventory's content validity.

Concurrent validity consisted of examining the relationship between mean ratings obtained from the importance and confidence subscales with comparable validators that were administered at the same time, which asked, 'How important is it to be a skilled group worker?' and, 'How confident are you about your group work skills?' There were statistically significant relationships between the measure and these validators, supporting the concurrent validity of the inventory.

Construct-convergent validity was determined by testing how the new measure correlated ('converged') with a similar, established measure. It was expected that the mean scores on the inventory would correlate with mean ratings on the Core Group Work Skills Inventory – Importance and Confidence (Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). There were statistically significant associations between the two measures, supporting the construct-convergent validity of the ICSWG inventory.

Finally, criterion validity consisted of two types, known groups and predictive. Known-groups validity involved comparing mean confidence subscale scores obtained from the established groupworkers (noted above), with entry-level BSW students with no previous group work training or experience. The expectation was that established groupworkers would have higher mean scale scores in their confidence in performing the items in the Standards, than the BSW students. The findings from the first study supported this. Predictive criterion validity involved comparing student confidence ratings on items with subsequent performance of those items in role plays that were rated by the professor. It was expected that students' early semester confidence scores would predict how clearly the student performed the skill in subsequent role plays within the class. The predictive validity findings were significant.

In sum, the first two stages of the development of the ICSWG illustrate how the IASWG Standards became an inventory with preliminary reliability and validity. The first study (Macgowan, 2012) produced the 70-item ICSWG that assesses respondent's appreciation for and

confidence in using the IASWG Standards. The inventory has since been used in several studies of teaching approaches to increase student learning about the Standards (Macgowan & Vakharia, 2012; Macgowan & Wong, in press; Shera, Muskat, Delay, Quinn, & Tufford, 2013), highlighting the utility of the inventory as a teaching tool.

Global standards, local relevance?

As it expands globally, groupwork will be realized in different ways (Cohen et al, 2012; Gray, 2005; Gray & Webb, 2008; Toseland & McClive-Reed, 2009). One is indigenization that seeks out and promotes local voices and culture in developing groupwork that is 'situated in particular socio-historical and cultural locations' (Gray, 2005, p. 232). In this view, a type of groupwork may emerge that is particular to one culture. Another is universalism where social work with groups is expected to be practised globally, based on a common set of principles, regardless of location. This approach would see commonalities in groupwork across cultures. The third is imperialism that promotes 'the dominance of Western world views over diverse local and indigenous cultural perspectives' (Gray, 2005, p. 231), which is not desirable as it ignores local cultures.

This study takes the second approach, but with a critical view of opening the dialogue to examine how the Standards appearing in the inventory would be perceived in the cultural context of Scotland. The Standards were developed by an international association; an important next stage in the process of developing and testing the Standards is to determine the reliability and validity of the inventory with participants from other parts of the world. This study replicates the test of reliability and some of the validation tests, with a Scottish sample. Specifically, this paper reports on the reliability and validity of the inventory from data collected from groupwork students and practitioners across Scotland, and includes comments about the inventory from participants. The paper also reports how the inventory may be used to increase confidence about using the Standards in practice.

Methods

Measure

The inventory was the 70-item ICSWG, described above. In addition, the measure included a few questions about each respondent and the validation scales, which are described in the results section below. Finally, there was an invitation to participants to make comments on the inventory.

Sample

The non-random sample included 161 participants. Data were collected through pen and paper responses by participants who attended workshops on groupwork and through distribution in social work classes in three locations in Scotland: Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee. Respondents were professionals leading groups but also included students in social work programs. Participants were mostly female (68%, $n = 110$) and the mean age of respondents was 39 years ($SD = 13$). For those who responded, participants were mostly British White (42%, $n = 67$) followed by Scottish White (37%, $n = 59$). The primary discipline was social work (81%, $n = 130$) and the highest degree obtained was baccalaureate (47%, $n = 76$) followed by masters (20%, $n = 32$). The project had Institutional Review Board approval from the author's home institution and from the host university.

The few cases ($n < 5$ of the sample) in which respondents completed less than 75% of either the importance or confidence subscales were discarded. The remaining cases were examined using SPSS 19 missing value analysis. No variable had more than 2% missing values, which is considered minimal (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Expectation-maximization (EM) imputation was utilized to impute the few missing values.

Reliability and validity testing

Reliability and validity testing was done on both subscales of the instrument. Reliability testing consisted of internal consistency.

The SEM, described earlier in the paper, was computed using the following formula:

$$SDt\sqrt{1 - rtt}$$

where SDt is the standard deviation of the test scores and rtt the reliability coefficient (Anastasi, 1988). The SEM (as an index of error) should be low.

With the exception of predictive validity, the analyses in this study replicated those in the first study (Macgowan, 2012). In this study, validity testing included content, concurrent, construct-convergent, and criterion consisting of known-groups, and used Spearman rank-order correlations.

Results

Reliability & standard error of measurement

Internal consistency for both the importance and confidence subscales was .97. The SEMs for the importance and confidence subscales were 4.05 and 4.76, respectively.

Validity

As was done in the first study in North America, expert review of each item was obtained to determine content validity within Scotland. Expertise was determined by Scottish practitioners with at least one university degree and at least ten years of groupwork experience ($n = 17$). These experts rated the importance of the items very highly ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .26$).

Concurrent validity testing involved examining the relationship between mean scores from the importance and confidence subscales with comparable validators included at the beginning of the instrument which asked, 'How important is it to be a skilled group worker?' and, 'How confident are you about your group work skills?' The importance subscale correlated modestly with the importance validator, $r(159) = .25$ $p = .001$. The confidence subscale correlated well with the confidence validator, $r(159) = .51$ $p < .001$.

Construct-convergent validity involved determining the association of mean scores on the inventory with mean ratings on the 27-item Core Group Work Skills Inventory, Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC), which was used in the first study. In a study of its psychometric properties, the CGWSI-IC had high internal consistency and good validity (Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). Although the CGWSI-IC shares similar content areas, the inventory based on the IASWG Standards is more comprehensive and includes additional areas reflecting the values and knowledge base of social work (e.g., mutual aid, task groups). However, although their content may differ in areas, it was expected that corresponding inventory mean scores would correlate significantly, as both inventories include items that are highly valued by the professional groupwork organizations that developed them.

Mean scale scores of the importance and confidence subscales of the CGWSI-IC were compared to the comparable subscale of the inventory in this study. In preliminary analyses with the Scottish sample, the CGWSI-IC importance and confidence subscales had alphas of .93 and .94, respectively. In the convergent validity analyses, the two importance subscales were strongly correlated with each other, $r(151) = .85, p < .001$, as well as the confidence subscales of each measure, $r(150) = .85, p < .001$. These findings support the convergent validity of the inventory. Because of the different content in the items, the measures are not interchangeable, but the comparison in overall mean scores suggests similarity in performance.

Criterion validity (known-groups) consisted of comparing mean confidence subscale scores derived from practitioners with at least one degree and at least ten years of groupwork experience ($n = 17$), with those in the sample who had no more than one degree and little or no experience in leading groups ($n = 18$). It was expected that the experienced groupworkers would have higher mean scale scores in their confidence in performing the items in the Standards, than the less-educated, inexperienced persons in the sample. The inexperienced groupworkers' confidence mean scale score was 2.82 ($SD = .23$) compared with the experienced groupworkers' mean scale score of 3.29 ($SD = .32$), which was a significant difference, $t(33) = 5.03, p < .001$. Thus, those with more group experience and education were clearly more confident about their abilities to perform the items on the inventory, when compared to novices.

Descriptive information about items

The mean for the importance subscale scale was 3.59, with a range of 3.22 to 3.89 ($SD = .31$). The mean for the confidence scale was 2.99, with a range of 2.65 to 3.40 ($SD = .41$). The top five items that respondents rated as 'least confident' were the following, from lower to higher confidence:

Item 28. 'Employs special skills in working with mandated members and understands the impact on group dynamics of member's mandated status' ($M = 2.66, SD = .74$);

Item 36. 'Promotes group exploration of non-productive norms when these arise' ($M = 2.68, SD = .74$);

Item 56. 'Uses tools of empowerment to assist members to develop 'ownership' of the group' ($M = 2.68, SD = .83$);

Item 13. 'Knows how to select members for the group in relationship to principles of group composition (may not apply to groups in which others determine the group's membership)' ($M = 2.71, SD = .76$);

Item 59. 'Uses group approaches appropriate to the populations served and the tasks undertaken as demonstrated in the literature, worker and agency experience, and other sources of professional knowledge' ($M = 2.73, SD = .70$).

Comments by respondents

Respondents were invited to provide written comments about the inventory. A few persons wrote that the inventory was too long and the items were too wordy. Also, some words in the inventory were not part of the common professional parlance in Scotland, resulting in confusion. For example the term 'statutory' is often used instead of 'mandated,' which appears in the inventory. Also, the term 'service user' is preferred over the term 'client.' Another term that was not readily clear was the phrase 'direct practice group,' which means groups in which practitioners help service users directly with their psychosocial issues, rather than 'task groups' (e.g., committees), which do not involve service users but other practitioners. Some of the other recommendations include changing 'group work' to 'groupwork,' 'clinical/clinician' to

‘practice/practitioner,’ ‘norms’ to ‘rules,’ and ‘co-worker’ to ‘co-leader.’

The instructions were also not clear to some respondents. Some participants did not respond to some items because it was thought that the item must pertain to their current groups. For example, item 55 states, ‘Assists members to make connections with other group members that may continue after the group ends, if this is appropriate.’ The respondent noted that s/he worked with statutory offenders who are required *not* to engage with each other outside group, and thus did not respond to that item. However, the intention of the inventory is for respondents to reply if they ‘could do’ rather than ‘currently do.’ As one respondent clarified, ‘the word ‘could’ rather than ‘do’ is significant - I ‘could’ but don’t necessarily ‘do.’” These comments were used to change the language of the inventory in a revised version (contact the author for a copy).

Discussion and applications for teaching and practice

This study is a second test of the reliability and validity of an inventory based on the IASWG Standards for the Practice of Social Work with Groups. The first study documented the development and test of the instrument with a mostly North American sample (Macgowan, 2012). This study reported the reliability and validity using an exclusively Scottish sample. The evidence from the first study indicated a measure with preliminary reliability and validity. This study continued to support the essential properties of the inventory. The reliability of the scale was excellent, and the standard error of measurement was desirably low. The error of measurement can be used to determine what change in scores may be due to error, and is useful for determining real change in repeated administrations (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). Changes should be outside of the range of the measurement error.

On multiple indicators, there was good evidence that the inventory is valid with the Scottish sample. As hypothesized, the Scottish groupwork experts rated the inventory items highly. The comments by respondents did not question the substantive validity of any of the items but did suggest that some changes were needed in administration and language, which have been incorporated in a version available from the author.

Inviting open-ended comments from participants about measures being validated in new countries should be a regular practice in the refinement of measures for global groupwork. The closed-ended questions did not reveal the issues raised by respondents.

An issue that was observed in the previous study and confirmed in this study is that using the 'importance' domain does not seem useful. Respondents almost always indicate that each item is 'important' or 'very important,' regardless of groupwork training or experience. This might be an issue with the constricted scaling but a wider response scale would only add to administration time, and is not likely to reflect important changes in responses. There is good variability in the confidence subscale. Although the importance subscale is useful for determining the value of each item for validation purposes, the lack of responses outside of 'important' does not make it useful for teaching or for practice. Excluding this subscale substantially reduces the time to complete the inventory. A version of the inventory without the importance subscale is available from the author.

An important concern in the process of globalization of professional social work is to ensure that standards developed in one part of the world are sensitive to the values and practices in another (Cohen et al, 2012; Gray, 2005; Roy et al, 2013; Toseland & McClive-Reed, 2009). The global dissemination of the IASWG Standards requires a critical examination of their relevance within different countries. Returning to the discussion at the beginning of the paper, this mixed-methods study followed a critical 'universalist' approach of an examination of both the inventory's reliability and validity and respondents' anonymous comments about its usability and value for their practice and teaching in Scotland. Although the Standards appearing in the inventory were not developed in Scotland, the data suggest it includes fundamentally sound concepts. However, relatively simple language changes in the Standards would help facilitate application in the local context. The findings from this study will be shared with IASWG for the next revision, and similar studies in other countries are encouraged in a critical process to ensure the principles in the Standards are indeed relevant in countries that would like to adopt them. Additionally, in the spirit of 'indigenous' groupwork, Scots are invited to continue to review and adapt the IASWG Standards, perhaps creating a new set of groupwork standards particular for their own country.

Applications for teaching and practice

Before using the inventory for practice or for teaching, the Standards should be read in their entirety, which are freely available for download (IASWG, 2006). Although the inventory includes items drawn directly from the Standards, the items should be viewed in the context of the original document, which contains important prefatory material and discussion.

Additionally, recall that the inventory includes items that represent a *foundation* level of performance with respect to appreciation of, and confidence in doing, the Standards. Participants using the inventory should aspire to consider each item as ‘important’ and should feel ‘confident’ in doing them. However, groupwork is complex, and competence is not determined by mastery of the items in the inventory. The inventory, based on the IASWG Standards, includes items that are important but represent only a minimal, beginning level of performance, and must be brought together in practice. To use a music analogy, the inventory contains items that represent *some* notes, but more are needed *and* they must be arranged to make a melody. The ‘arranging’ requires learning other competencies not necessarily included in the Standards which results in skills to know what to use, when, and how. These abilities are learned in coursework and in supervised practicum experience as parts of professional learning.

The items that respondents were least confident in implementing should be a priority for teaching and training about groupwork. In particular, the two items that respondents felt least confident implementing, related to working with mandated (statutory) members and group exploration of non-productive norms (rules), should be a top priority in groupwork training. Table 1 (overleaf) includes annotated references from the literature that may be useful for building effective strategies in these two areas.

Table 1 Annotated Readings for Top Two Inventory Items Respondents are 'Least Confident' in Doing

Working with Mandated Members in Groups (Item 28)

Behroozi, C. S. (1993) A model for social work with involuntary applicants in groups. *Social Work With Groups*, 15, 2-3, 223-238

Provides a model for social work with involuntary applicants in groups.

Describes techniques under three practice principles: (1) help them move from 'applicant' to 'client' (i.e., group member); (2) deal with applicant's response to coercion; and (3) deal with perception of the problem and the need to change.

Morgan, R. D., Romani, C. J. & Gross, N. R. (2014) Groupwork with offenders and mandated clients. in J. L. DeLucia-Waack, C. R. Kalodner & M. Riva (Eds.) *The Handbook of Group Counseling and Psychotherapy* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (pp. 441-449)

Effective programs incorporate four elements, (a) a model of intervention based on Risk (group therapy intensity matched to offender risk), Need (tailored to unique needs) and Responsivity (matched to learning styles and ability of members); (b) cognitive-behavioral therapy; (c) structure in the therapeutic environment; and (d) homework.

Morgan, R. D. & Flora, D. B. (2002) Group psychotherapy with incarcerated offenders: A research synthesis. *Group Dynamics*, 6, 3, 203-218

Meta-analysis of 26 studies involving incarcerated offenders, which compared a treatment group against a control group. Out-of-group homework exercises resulted in improved outcomes compared to groups not utilizing such exercises.

Rooney, R. H. (2009) Work with involuntary groups. in R. H. Rooney (Ed.) *Strategies for work with involuntary clients* (2nd ed.) New York: Columbia University Press (pp. 244-272)

Stage model of working with mandated clients: Clarify 'non-negotiables,' be clear about rights and choices, including constrained choices, expect oppositional behavior, identify current motivations and positive skills and knowledge to be gained in group.

Rooney, R. H., & Chovanec, M. (2004) Involuntary groups. in C. D. Garvin, L. M. Gutierrez & M. J. Galinsky (Eds.) *Handbook of social work with groups*. New York: Guilford (pp. 212-226)

Includes discussion about work with legally mandated clients, appropriate interventions, and clinical techniques for engaging involuntary clients into groupwork. Also discusses non-personal factors contributing to offending including oppression, restricted access to resources, and unsafe neighborhoods.

Thomas, H. & Caplan, T. (1999) Spinning the group process wheel: Effective facilitation techniques for motivating involuntary client groups. *Social Work with Groups*, 21, 4, 3-22

Describes three categories (process, linking, inclusion) of 56 techniques for working with involuntary clients in groups.

Group Exploration of Non-Production Norms (Item 36)

Northen, H. (1988) *Social work with groups* (2nd ed.) New York: Columbia University Press

Norms need to be flexible - inflexible norms inhibit members' participation (p. 36).

Sklare, G., Keener, R., & Mas, C. (1990) Preparing members for 'Here-and-Now' group counseling. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 15, 3, 141-148

Builds on Yalom's 'here and now' perspective - gives many recommendations on how to handle nonproductive norms in groups (e.g., 'you/we' statements; rescuing; resistance). Turn the issue into a discussion that helps all members of the group explore the norm in depth.

Toseland, R. W. & Rivas, R. F. (2009) *An introduction to group work practice* (6th ed.) Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon

Norms can be changed through discussion and direct intervention (p. 80).

Members have the opportunity to evaluate the dysfunctional norms and help create new ones that may help the group and its purpose (p. 83). It is important the group leader pays attention to members' behaviors and encourages them to express how they feel about the norms and how these help them to accomplish their objectives.

The inventory may be used at the beginning of a course semester or a continuing professional development event so that learners could identify in what areas they feel least confident. These items can become part of a personal learning contract for the semester or the training. Learners would work on developing proficiency in the items through further readings, role plays in simulations, and applications in real groups, using the self-report inventory used in this study and the observer-rated version that has been developed (available from the author). Two studies have evaluated this method of teaching with good results (Macgowan & Vakharia, 2012; Macgowan & Wong, in press). A manual is in development with tools to help learners understand and demonstrate the skills in practice. The inventory could also be used in

less structured or broad-based educational and training approaches, which would integrate the Standards as a core part of the experience (Kurland & Salmon, 1998; Wayne & Cohen, 2001). For example, in the UK, there is the groupwork project that consisted of workshops and consultations in agencies, which included an evaluation of portfolios and a *viva voce* for each learner (Doel, 2006, 2009; Doel & Sawdon, 1999). The inventory could be incorporated in such initiatives.

Limitations & further research

The findings, although positive, are preliminary and should be further tested. Specifically, the revised measure with the language changes should be tested, which is expected to only improve the performance of the measure.

This study is based on a non-random sample at selected sites in Scotland. Additional studies are needed with larger samples in Scotland. Additional testing is needed on different samples in other parts of the United Kingdom and in other English-speaking countries. In the spirit of an ‘indigenous’ perspective of global groupwork, further scrutiny of the Standards is encouraged in an effort to ensure that groupwork standards fully incorporate knowledge, values, and skills within country. The evidence from this study suggests that the Standards, as reflected in this study, are generally congruent with local practices (with some language changes), reflecting a ‘universalist’ perspective. However, the design of this study was not to develop a new set of Standards, but to test the existing model as represented in the measure. A different study is needed that would incorporate an exploratory (rather than a confirmatory) approach to ensure standards are fully localized.

With a large sample in Scotland, a wider variety of validation tests may be done such as predictive validity and an examination of the factor structure of the inventory. Although not with an exclusive Scottish sample, a factor analytic study is underway to examine what concepts underlie and bind the items, which will yield a shorter version while retaining the essential components (Macgowan & Dillon, 2015). The factors would identify broader skill sets that could be learned, which would advance methods of teaching that are concept-based.

Summary and conclusion

The inventory of foundation groupwork competencies in social work with groups had excellent internal consistency with a low standard error of measurement. The validation analyses (content, concurrent, construct-convergent, and criterion known-group) suggested that the measure performed well. Both quantitative ratings and open-ended comments suggested the inventory's items were important and valuable, with some suggested language changes. There were no fundamental concerns with the items and they would therefore seem to fit within the type of groupwork that is in Scotland. However, the sample was not representative of Scottish groupworkers and the design of the study was confirmatory rather than exploratory; it is yet to be seen if the Standards fully reflect the Scottish perspective of social work with groups. The inventory is intended to stimulate teaching, training, and practice of the Standards, and to stimulate discussion about foundation competencies in social work with groups in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom.

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