

# First Year Experience Conference 2012

## Exploring small group learning in higher education

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CENTENARY



# Workshop plan

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- Welcome and introductions
- Excitements and concerns in working with small groups
- What does the literature say? A brief overview
- Group task & plenary discussion
- Conclusion
- References

# Introductions

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- Pair with someone you do not know
- In pairs, share your name, where you are from and what you hope to get out of today's session
- Introduce your partner to the group

# Experiences with using small group learning in your own teaching context?

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*Greatest excitement?*



*Greatest challenge?*



# Excitements?

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Students:

- Learn to function in groups (important personally and professionally)
- Learn from each-other, to share ideas & to defend their views
- Learn experientially about interactive skills, group dynamics & processes
- Retain more

IT IS FUN!!!

# Challenges?

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## **Task versus group process** (maintenance)

- Creates anxiety and tension within and between individuals

## **Group process/ phases,**

### **Group roles,**

### **Group dynamics**

- Need to decide when & how to intervene

# Group Phases

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- Distinct phases
  - Across weeks
  - Within each session

Northouse & Northouse (1998)	Tuckman (1965)	Northern (2001)
Orientation	Forming	Orientation
Conflict	Storming	Testing Out
Cohesion	Norming	
Working	Performing	Working
Termination	Adjourning	Ending

# What can we do?

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Phase	Behaviour	Response
Orientation	Overly polite; cooperative; eager to please; anxious; withdrawn	Warmth; non-judgemental behaviour; icebreakers; contracting

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Working	Participatory; harmonious; energetic; positive	Support interaction and responsibility of group members; encourage reflection
Ending	Regression to orientation & testing out; anxiety; sadness; bargaining; acceptance	Anticipate and plan for ending; recognise & accept all feelings; clarify gains

# Roles & Dynamics

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- Examples include:

Task (goal oriented)	Maintenance (enhance group functioning)	Egocentric (individual emotional needs)
Initiator	Encourager	Playboy
Energizer	Diplomat	Monopolizer
Information giver	Follower	Silent member

# What is going on?

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- Monopolizer
  - Tends to dominate
  - Maybe perceived as a leader
  - Motivations vary
    - Anxiety
    - Fear of inadequacy
    - Fear of closeness
    - Rebellion against authority
- Silent member
  - Uninvolved
  - Non-participatory
  - Motivations vary
    - Attention seeking
    - Anxiety
    - Fear of self-disclosure
    - Difficulty in verbalising

# Scenarios and what can we do?

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Read your scenario, discuss and summarise your answers on newsprint:

- What is going on?
- Is there a problem beneath the problem?
- Is the problem individual or group based?

What possible strategies can you use?

- Beforehand?
- In the moment?
- Afterwards?



# Scenario 1

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You have an educational group of ten first year students and you will be working together for ten weeks. It is the first group meeting. Three of the students know each-other but the others have never met. The three who know each-other are chatty and whisper to one-another now and again. The others are quiet and waiting for you to begin.

## Scenario 2

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It is the third meeting you are having with your group of eight students. In the first two meetings, everyone was well-behaved and compliant. This session, one student arrives late and some of the others appear to challenge everything from the relevance of the course to the activities they need to do. The more they challenge, the more the other group members become quiet and withdrawn.

# Scenario 3

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It is week five of twelve sessions and your group of twelve first year students is well settled into the working phase. One student however has remained very quiet while another seems to dominate discussions at every opportunity.

# Conclusion

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Group work.....

- Requires a focus on task and process
- Is extremely challenging BUT also rewarding

# References & Further reading

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## About working with groups

- Edmunds, S. & Brown, G. (2010). *Effective small group learning*. AMEE Guide 48
- Northern, H (2001). *Social work with groups* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition
- Northouse, L.L. & Northouse, P.G. (1998). *Health communication: strategies for health professionals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed
- Tuckman, B (1965). *Developmental sequence in small groups*. *Psychological bulletin* 63:384-399

**Thank you**

