Group Dynamics Workshop

Louise Goldring
The workshop

- Part of a series (‘EBL and Facilitation Skills’ and ‘Designing Triggers’) so this workshop will not look specifically at those aspects in details.

- It WILL focus on group work; particularly setting it up in order to achieve positive group dynamics and spotting potential problems before they occur.

- It will use your experiences and expertise.

Every technique we use in the workshop can be adapted and adjusted for your own needs.
EBL in brief!

- Learning driven by research – uses our natural curiosity
- Student-Centred Learning, self-directed learning – taking ownership of the learning process (the ‘how’), and sometimes of the content (the ‘what’)
- Facilitated rather than taught – ‘lighting the fire’ instead of ‘filling the pot’
- Usually emphasis on group work
- Ideally based on the ‘real world’ – a real life problem/scenario and/or approach to solving problems
- Students gain both generic skills and subject content & skills
Some types of EBL

- Task-based Learning (TBL) ‘crisp problem’
- Problem-based Learning (PBL) ‘messy problem’
- Small-scale empirical investigations
- Projects and Research, often bibliographic
- Fieldwork or case study
- Research-based approach to projects
- Discovering answer to a scenario chosen to cover specific content/skills
- Devising solutions to a scenario chosen to cover specific content/skills

How well do your examples or others you know of fit these categories?
What students say about EBL:

You are actively involved in your own learning and control most aspects of it, the content which you learn is better retained, rather than the knowledge you acquire from lectures.

Helps to stimulate learning; Encourages more discussion of learning with other students; If other students have covered stuff in more detail then you know you have some extra work to do!

It pushed me to research grammar in my own time - I can still remember the work I did rather than forgetting what teachers tell you.
Part 1
‘Be prepared’
Or
Dealing with group problems before they occur!
• In pairs:
  - Introduce yourselves and number yourselves one and two

Number One:
  - Describe a positive experience of group work you have had
    • Were there specific factors that influenced this?
      (e.g. group mix, clarity of task, facilitator etc)

Number Two:
  - Describe a negative experience
    • Were there specific factors that influence this?
Talking about group work

- Get all the baggage about group work out in the open!

- Encourage groups to think about the specifics rather than making sweeping statements
  - If you liked group work, why?
  - If not, why not?
Group work – dealing with resistance

• Introduce yourself to the group

• As a group discuss
  – Do you feel any personal resistance to group work? Why do you feel like that?
  – Nominate someone in your groups to make a note of these points for later
Student experiences

The session would have gone no differently if the students had not been there.

From my experience, it's an 'every man for himself' situation.

The group work was fun but irrelevant and no conclusions were drawn as to the point of it.
Setting up group work – the big questions

- Why are you asking them to get into groups?
- How will they form groups?
- What will they do when they are in them?
- What will the outcome be?

Before asking your students to work in groups make sure you know the answer to these questions

TELL THE STUDENTS WHY!
Conscious Competence Model

- Mature practice
- Reflective competence
- Conscious competence
- Unconscious competence
- Unconscious incompetence
- Naive
- Discovery
- Beginners' mind
- Discouragement
- Learning
- Effort tutelage mentorship
- 2nd nature "intuition"
- Self-study peer review
- Practice

Changing knowledge
Complacency
Ignorance
Unconscious errors

Taylor, W. Department of Homeopathic Medicine, National College of Natural Medicine, Portland, Oregon, USA, 2007
Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning
Why do group work?
(Selling it to students!)

- Be careful of generic sounding phrases e.g. “it will help you learn better”

- Be careful of sounding patronising e.g. “it’s for your own good”!

- Make it specific to the particular project e.g. not why you’re doing group work but why you’re doing THIS group work

- Make it relevant to the participants
  - **How** will it improve their skills
  - **How** will that make them more employable/better at their discipline/more able to work with others in the future etc...
Forming successful groups

Two features are essential to a group:

A common identity - usually a common purpose - for all its members

Interaction between the members allowing for the development of shared attitudes and feelings, some emotional involvement, a minimum set of agreed values or standards.

For many groups there is a third factor - successful groups feel they are moving forward in some way.

Carl Rogers (2002) about groups (Teaching Adults OUP: 143)
Getting into groups

- Personal experience is that 4 – 7 members works

- There is no ‘right’ way to put students in groups!

- Decide on the purpose of the group work and which aspect is more important and form groups accordingly
  - E.g. if creating a ‘common purpose’ is most important then ask groups to pick the topic they would most like to work on and form groups that way

- Other ways to consider include
  - Randomly assigning people to groups
  - Ability based
  - Letting people work in their friendship groups
Creating the right environment

• Compare the two photos, in your groups, and answer the following questions for each:

  – What is happening in the group?
  – How do group members feel about each other?
  – How would you facilitate this?
Creating the right environment

- Encourage an environment where groups can talk freely (physically and mentally!)

- Think about whether you want your groups to have roles (e.g. scribe in first photo)

- Think about where you fit into the group dynamics and make sure you’ve made that clear to groups
Creating the right atmosphere

• One way to do this is by forming ground rules that are meaningful to the group

• Imagine you are beginning work on a project together as a group. Using your table’s list of reservations about group work, from earlier:
  – Take each point on the list and form a ground rule for your group out of it

This ensures that the ground rules formed are relevant for the group’s needs and anxieties about group work
Break

Please sit with a new group when you get back!
Part 2

‘Managing group work’
Icebreakers...
Mike, Carmel, you go to the garden store and get five bags of lime. Dana, Gord, Jill, get me a tarp and carpet, then check Google Earth for a secluded stretch of highway. The rest of you, you’ll help me bury the facilitator... who, ironically, has apparently just led the most successful team-building exercise in our company’s history.
Icebreakers

• A good way to give groups a chance to get to know each other and have a practice

• Top tips
  – Make it relevant (to participants and the material)
  – Make them interact
  – Make it a starting point
Designing Icebreakers

• Work in a pair

• You have 15 minutes to design an icebreaker based on context you’ve been given
  – You can use any of the resources available around the room

• Think about:
  – Relevance of your icebreaker – what are you trying to do?
  – Encouraging communication
  – Resources on the day - what do you have access to?
Theories of group development

- Tubb’s, Fisher’s and Tuckerman’s
  - Linear theories of development

- Tuckerman’s (1965) is most well known
  - Forming
  - Storming
  - Norming
  - Performing
  - Adjourning or Mourning (added in 1977)

- Can be simplistic, group development is rarely linear in real life
Poole’s (1983) Small Group Development Theory

- **Task track** – process by which group accomplishes goals

- **Topic Track** – Specific item group is discussing

- **Relation Track** – Interpersonal relationships in the group

- **Breakpoints** – Switching from one track to another

- This model allows for the complexity of group work and acknowledges that many things are going on at once in a single group situation
Identifying potential group development problems

- Each table will have a group work scenario. Imagine you have set the project for your students.
- As a group, using the poster boards in a flow chart style
  - Map out the processes the students would go through to achieve this task
  - On top of this process map, plan out where the potential problem stages are and how you would avoid or deal with them

- Use the different colours to mean:
  - Yellow – student task
  - Pink – potential problems
  - Green – tutor/facilitator solutions
  - Orange – time frame (if relevant)
Session 1: Students receive the project outline, are put into a group and allocate tasks

1 week

Session 2: Group comes back together to review progress and fill in research gaps

Facilitator suggests group forms ground rules based on these anxieties

A group are anxious/unsure about working together

One group member hasn’t done the work
Self-regulating groups

- Make sure groups know who is responsible for what and what your role is, as the facilitator

- Encourage groups to be reflective about the processes they go through, individually and as a group
  - You could use learning logs for this
  - Remember Poole’s theory and address the different tracks

- Include some feedback/formative assessment
  - This could come from you to the whole group, you to individuals or peer to peer
‘One thing I’ll try is...’

• What one thing will you take away from today?
• Discuss it in your groups.
Finally...

- Evaluation form
  Help us to improve the workshop

- CEEBL Online – Facebook and web pages
  ‘CEEBL – University of Manchester’
  If you’re interested in talking with peers about EBL and facilitation please join and use the discussion boards

THANK YOU!
• Will Taylor, Chair, Department of Homeopathic Medicine, National College of Natural Medicine, Portland, Oregon, USA, March 2007 from http://www.businessballs.com/consciouscompetencelearningmodel.htm

• Carl Rogers (2002) about groups, Teaching Adults OUP: 143


