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The Effect of Group Diversity on Learning on a University-Based Foundation Course

Sarah Chipperfield- The University of Huddersfield
Background

- Foundation course for the health professions
- One-year full-time pre-degree course
- Designed for non-traditional student entry
- 65% pass mark guaranteed progression to chosen degree pathway:
  - Physiotherapy
  - Midwifery
  - Podiatry
  - Operating Dept Practice
  - Occupational Therapy
  - Nursing (adult, child, mental health branches)
The Idea

**Mature student:** They have got to take into consideration that we presumed foundation means foundation and not A-Level.

**A-Level student:** Yes, but it goes, A-Level, Foundation, Degree.

**Mature student:** Yes, that’s fine if you come from education and you know what that means.

**A-Level student:** That’s the risk you’re gonna have to take.
Background

- ‘Fear’ apparent at interview, particularly in those returning to education
  ‘Fragile learner identities’ (Waller, 2004)

- Challenge for students
  Academic, socially, confidence, self-esteem, organisation, insight?

- Challenge for educators
  Level of classes, managing mixed ability groups, maintaining interest?
Aims

- How does group diversity affect the learning experience during a university-based foundation course for the health professions?

- Suggest ways in which fears of group diversity might be alleviated

- Promote benefits from teaching and learning in diverse groups

- Consider overall findings for course revalidation process
Method

- Ethical approval and consent gained
- Individual unstructured interviews
- A purposive sample of thirteen students (11 female, 2 male)
- All had completed the foundation course for the health professions
- Data analysed using a qualitative, grounded theory approach
- Emergent themes analysed in relation to sociological theory
### Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*Name chosen by participants</th>
<th>Age upon entry to FCHP</th>
<th>Highest Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>GCSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
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<td>NVQ3</td>
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<td>Vicky</td>
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<td>Helen</td>
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<td>Emma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ann-Marie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Steven</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Madeline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Unrelated degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>CSE City and Guilds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Themes - Competition

- Intra-cohort rivalry
- Inter-cohort rivalry
- Tutor-induced competition

COMPETITION
Key Themes- Self-Preservation

- Own Agenda
- Fear of Failure
- Moving Goal-Posts
- Sacrifice
- Isolation of Group
- Fear of Plagiarism
- Group ‘Self’ as FCHP

Self-Preservation
Key Themes - Camaraderie

- Peer Support
- Early Formation of Intra-Cohort Groups
- Smaller Groups Encouraging
- Group Diversity ‘Positive’
- Bandwagon
- Them and Us Rivalry
Themes

• Social interaction
  Glaser’s ‘mainline family’ (1978)
  Interactionism – interaction between individuals in small scale society (Haralambos and Holburn 2000)

• Individualisation

• Social Identity
  Intra-cohort- ‘in’ v ‘out’ groups (Chen and Li, 2007)
  Learner identities (Waller, 2004)
Ideas for Improvement?

- Admissions/ pre-enrolment information
- Encourage early interaction amongst students
- Induction week group activities
- Learning syndicates across modules
- Working in small groups within modules to develop team working skills
- Assist in summative group presentations
- Staff awareness of student needs and aspirations
- 65%.....too much pressure?
Thank you

References

- Chen, Y and Li, X. (2007) Group Identity and Social Preferences. 12\textsuperscript{th} December 2007. [online] Available at: \url{http://www.si.umich.edu/~yanchen/papers/identity_20071212.pdf} Accessed 06.03.08


