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Chipperfield, Sarah

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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

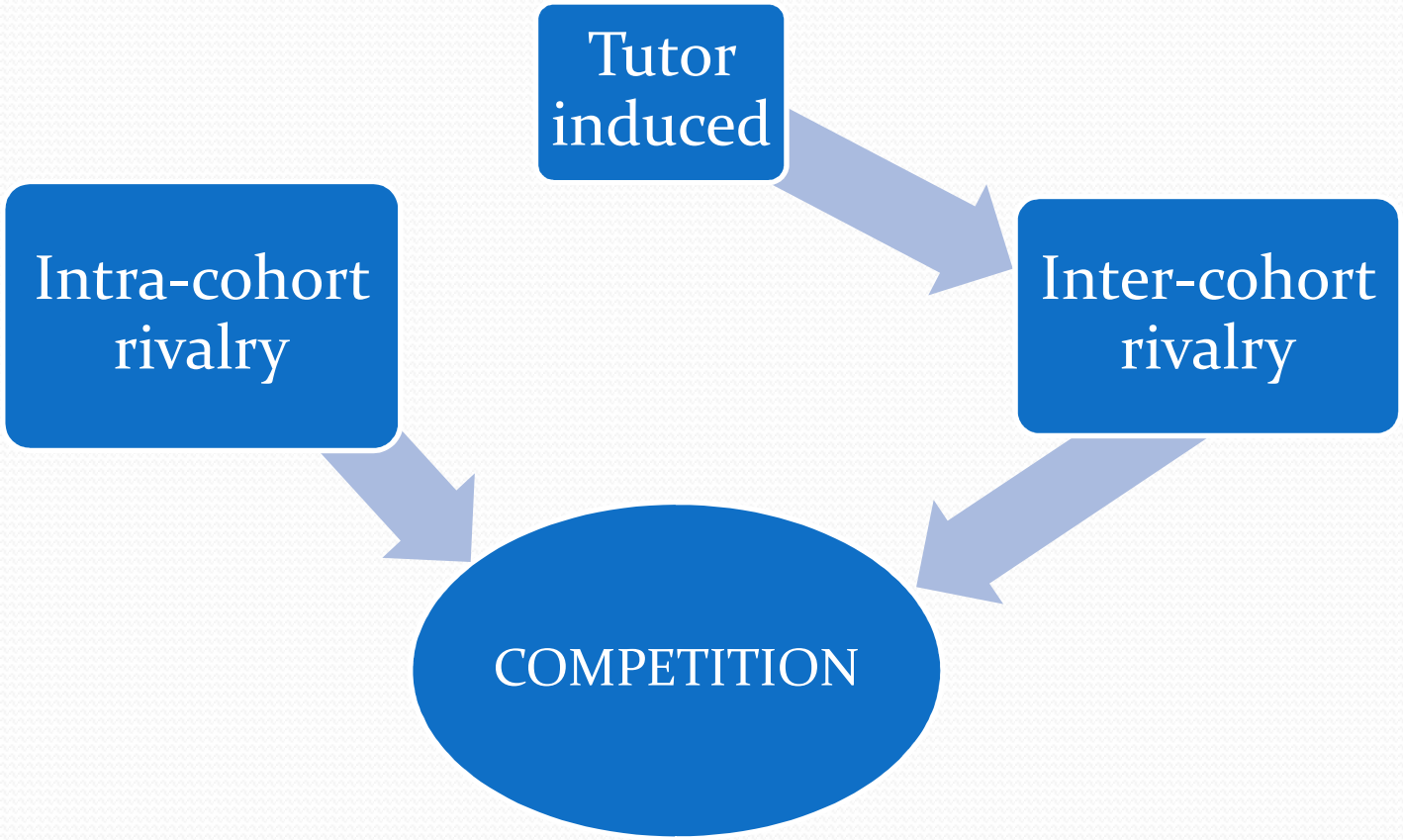
Method

- 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

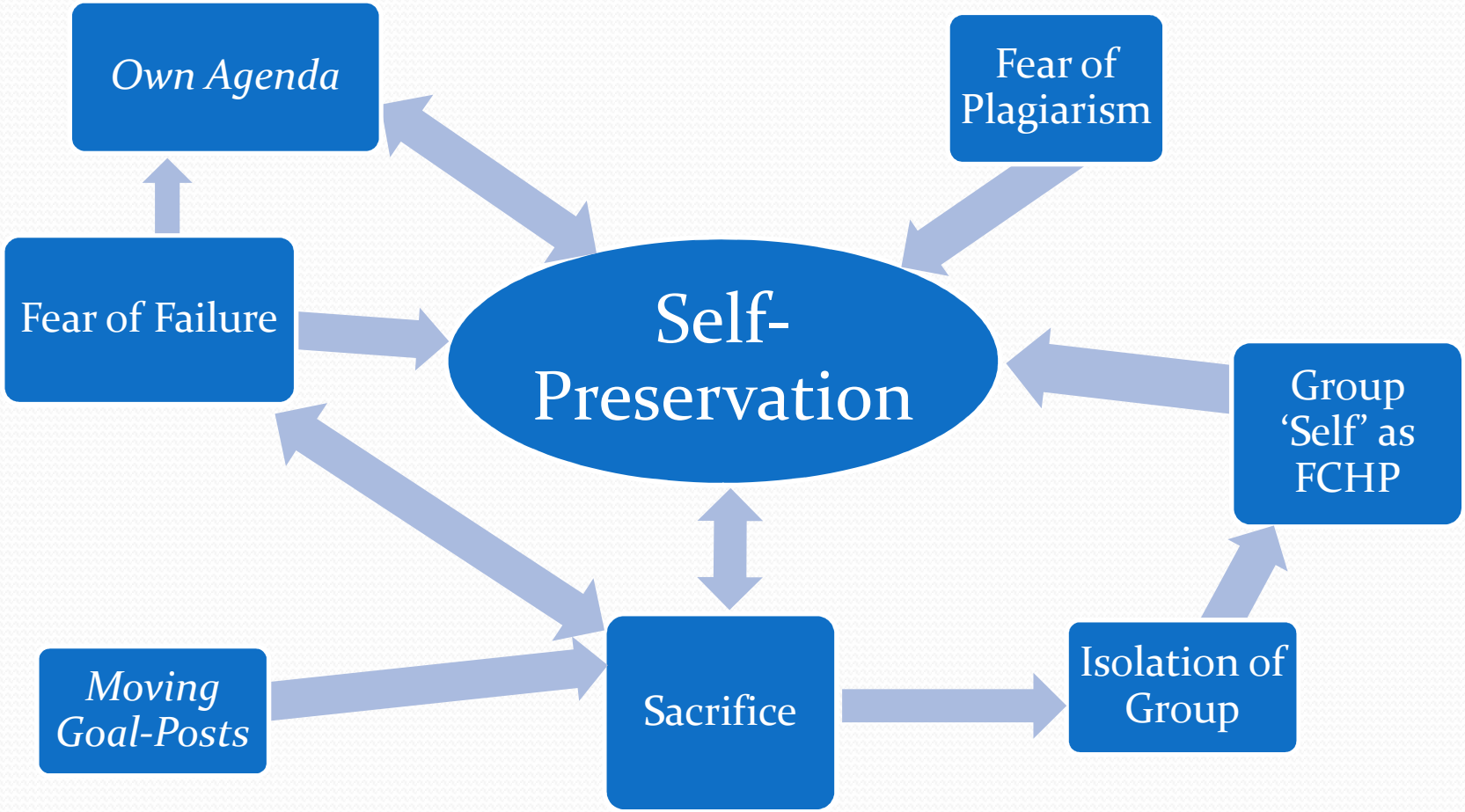
Participants*

*Name chosen by participants	Age upon entry to FCHP	Highest Qualifications
Kirsty	39	GCSE
Caroline	34	NVQ3
Vicky	28	GNVQ
Helen	46	GCE
Emma	20	A-Levels
Ann-Marie	33	1st year access course
Rachel	20	GCSE
Steven	43	NVQ III in Care
Madeline	35	A-Levels
Lucy	28	A-Levels
Elizabeth	32	Unrelated degree
Julie	49	None
Matthew	39	CSE City and Guilds

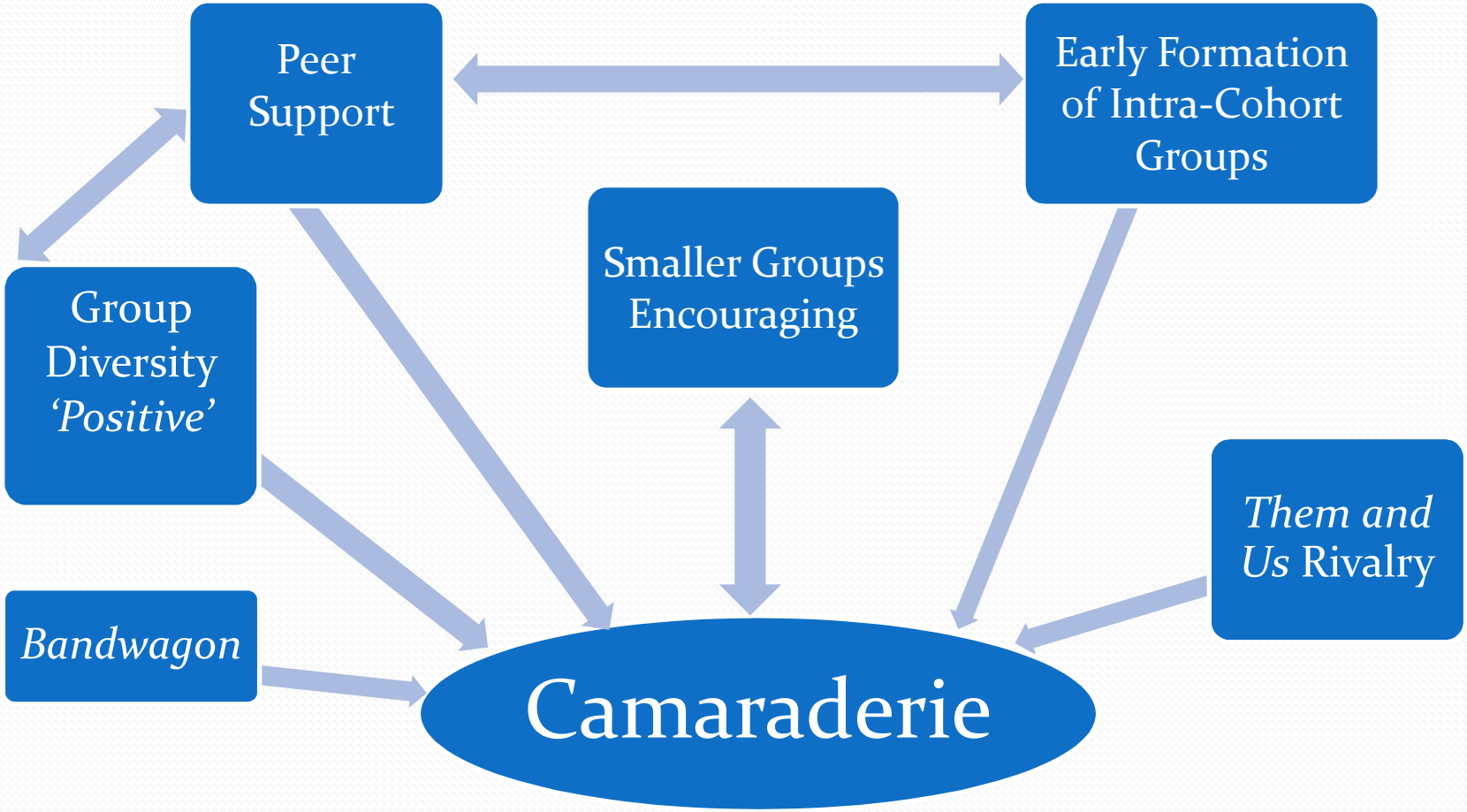
Key Themes- Competition



Key Themes- Self-Preservation



Key Themes- Camaraderie



Themes

- Social interaction

  Glaser's 'mainline family' (1978)

  Interactionism – interaction between individuals in small scale society (Haralambos and Holburn 2000)

- Individualisation

  Of risk (Beck, 1992 cited by Reay, 2003)

  Goal-orientated conduct (Weber, 1962 cited by O'Donnell, 1993)

- 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

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