# *Fostering Collaboration in Problem-based Learning: Some Group Dynamics Issues*

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# *Outline of Comments*

My teaching context

The problem-based learning unit

Issues with which groups struggle

How I address these issues

# *Teaching Context*
## *EAD 861 Adult Learning*

❖ Graduate-level course on adult learning
 – Emphasizing research and theory
 – Taught online – most asynchronous
 – 25 participants
❖ Problem-based
 – Real-life problems derived from educational practice
 – Increasingly complex and multi-dimensional
❖ Combination of individual and group work
 – Group and individual grades
 – Individual work grounded in group experience
 – Groups use consensus process for decision-making
❖ Groups
 – Three to four  students
 – Teacher assigned
 – Usually diverse

# *Structure of Problem Units*

❖ Introduction to the case
- – Framing the case within the research and theory
- – Reading assigned material

❖ Case scenario

❖ Generating preliminary understanding of the case
- – Statement of problem
- – Possible factors contributing to the problem

❖ Researching the problem
- – Guiding questions facilitate group research and study
- – Usually involves a division of labor

❖ Developing the group report (grounded in the research)
- – Clear statement of problem and why it is a problem
- – Factors contributing to the problem
- – Recommendations to address the problem

❖ Debriefing
- – Group process
- – Individual reflection on one's learning

# Process Issues

- ❖ Individual versus the group
  - *Learners want to be actively involved and to work with others*
  - *But they want to be held individually accountable for their own learning*
- ❖ The problem of authority
  - *Learners need to depend on themselves and one another as emerging authorities in the cases*
  - *Yet they want to depend on instructor as primary authority*
- ❖ The problem of intimacy
  - *Learners want to feel a sense of belonging within the group and need to relate and interact with one another*
  - *But developing a sense of belong and relatedness involves taking risks and disclosing aspects of oneself*

# *Addressing the Issues*

❖ Curricular approaches
  – Orientation to PBL and group work
  – Practice problem-based unit
  – Group debriefing and individual reflections
  – Individual unit mid-way through

❖ Instructional approaches
  – Resource more than primary source
  – Maintaining presence but posing questions, drawing attention to issues, potential contradictions, etc
  – Fostering integration of both content and process
  – Seeing individual issues as group concerns

# *Lingering Issues*

Managing the work


Independence vs interdependence


Integrating issues into the learning