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**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA

Assessment of Learning Series:

# Assessing Collaborative Learning and Group Work

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# Land Acknowledgement



Art by Christi Belcourt

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cia4T9euYUu/>

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

# Access Check

Encourage you to check, identify, and question your learning environment for any of the following and welcome comments if there are elements that we can support to reduce barriers.

- Technology
- Resources
- Pace
- Sound



# Assessment of Learning Series



To engage instructors in critical discussions about their current educational assessment practices.



To connect educational assessment scholarship with current teaching and learning practices in support of evidence-based pedagogy.

# Session outline

1. Defining group work and collaborative learning
2. Group reflection: what works in your classroom in assessing group work? What are some of the challenges you've faced?
3. Benefits and challenges of group work and collaborative learning
4. Case study discussion
5. Assessment suggestions from the literature
6. A reframe of group work assessment



# Defining group work and collaborative learning

- Group work involves students learning together from each other (Biggs and Tang, 2011)
- Group work rooted in Vygotsky's *Social Constructivism* where knowledge is co-constructed through collaboration and social interaction among learners (Kalina & Powell, 2009)
- 3 types of groups in higher ed (Davis, 1993 as cited in Davies, 2009):
  - Informal groups (formed ad hoc: e.g. think pair share)
  - Formal groups (organized to complete a task over a period of time)
  - Study groups (student driven)



# Group reflection

How have you assessed group work in your class?

- How do you know when group work is supporting learning for students?
- How do you know when group is not supporting learning for students?



# Benefits of group work and collaborative learning



- Can promote problem-based learning and is considered a more authentic form of assessment (Davies, 2009)
- Can develop transferrable skills for life-long learning
  - e.g. teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, project management, communication skills (Chiriac, 2014).
- Students can be more motivated to achieve academic goals when working in a group than individually (Chiriac, 2014).



# Challenges with group work and collaborative learning

- Motivational issues of students not putting in effort to contribute to the group
- Free-riding: when certain group members don't contribute to the group product, and still get rewarded for it (Davies, 2009)
- Can lead to resentment from others on the team



# Case study discussion:

In a university-level course, students are assigned a group project that constitutes a significant portion of their final grade. The project requires collaboration, research, and a final presentation. One student approaches you with concerns that their group members are not contributing equally to the project. They feel overwhelmed and frustrated, believing that the lack of effort from others will negatively impact their grade.

## **Key Issues**

**Unequal Contribution:** The student reports that some group members are not participating in meetings, not completing assigned tasks, and not responding to communication.

**Impact on Grades:** The student is worried that the group's overall performance will suffer, affecting their individual grade.

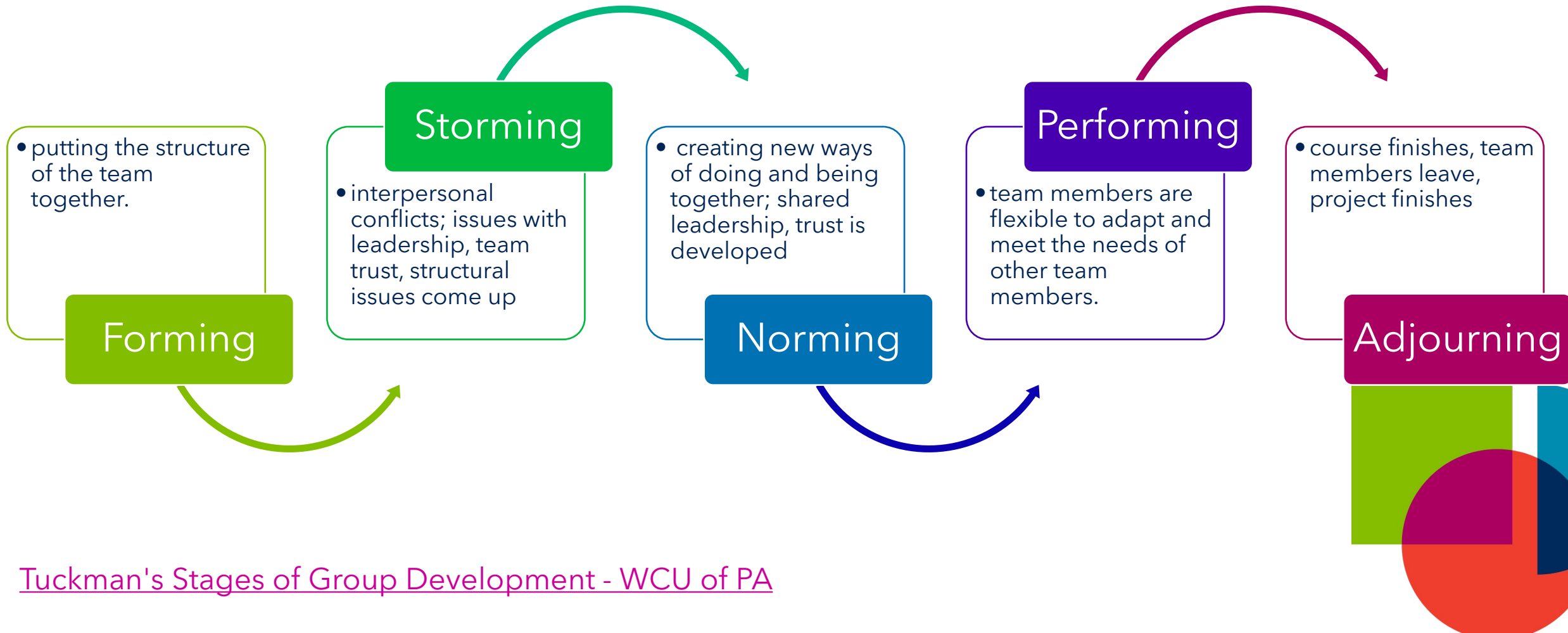
**Group Dynamics:** The lack of participation is causing tension and conflict within the group, making collaboration difficult.

Discuss with your groups the following:

1) How would you handle this situation or how have you handled similar situations?



# Tuckman's Stages of Group Development



# Assessment considerations for group work

Group contracts



Peer assessment



Two-stage exams



# Group contracts



- A contract the students generate to formalize expectations for their group members and themselves
- Can set the tone of individual accountability to the group, and can help “motivate ownership of learning” (p. 5, Hesterman, 2016).

[Making Group Contracts - University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence](#)



# Group contracts



Design considerations:

- Consider the learning outcomes from the group work
  - Assigned roles? Rotation of roles?
  - How will students divide the workload?
  - What role will the students have in mediating conflict? What role with the instructor have?
  - Consider mid-term contract revision of terms

[Making Group Contracts - University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence](#)



# Peer assessment

- Peer assessment of group members helps to increase individual responsibility for their learning (Liu & Carless, 2006), and raise quality of their contributions to the group (Meijer et al., 2020)
- Can help with managing free-loading, have students feel more engaged with their learning through being heard (Adesina et al., 2022).
- Can reveal learning that occurs from the process of working in a group, in addition to the group product (Adesina et al., 2022)



# Peer assessment

- Design considerations:
- Clarify criteria (through question prompts and/or rubrics) on what students should be peer assessing
- For larger group projects, have multiple peer assessment points
- Provide training on how to give constructive feedback

(Fleckney et al., 2024; Little et al., 2025).



# Two-stage exams



- Students complete academic work individually, submit it for grading, and then complete the same work in small group settings.
- Final group product is submitted for grading.
- Academic work: Written work, problem set, exam questions
- Learning benefits: development of feedback dialogues, internal feedback generation, elaboration of students' prior understanding, develops group work skills (communication, collaboration)

[Nicol & Selveretnam \(2022\)](#)



# Two-stage exams



Design considerations:

- Individual work weighted higher than the group product [Nicol & Selveretnam \(2022\)](#)
- Consider implementing a student reflection after the group discussion in the two stage exam
- Consider your department recommendations and accessibility logistics of how to implement two-stage exams in the final exam period



# A Reframe of Assessment in Group Settings

- The assessment paradigm values individualism over the learning goals for the group/community (Boud and Bearman, 2024; Nieminen, 2024).

*“Regardless of the social situatedness of learning, assessment in education and training contexts is conventionally constructed as a predominantly individualistic process where judgements are made on the performance of singular individuals. It is regarded essentially as an act engaged in by individuals as individuals, not by groups or by people collaborating with each other.” (p. 461, Boud and Bearman, 2024)*



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# Thank you!

Questions and  
comments?

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