

Teaching Group Dynamics: A Guide for Faculty

TEACHING GROUP DYNAMICS: A GUIDE FOR FACULTY

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In the world we live in today, we are constantly on teams of various kinds, even ones that seem different from traditional teams (family, friends, religious activities, etc). Group Dynamics is a course that allows students to explore various roles they will have in these teams, and it provides an opportunity to practice interpersonal skills to improve and enhance their future experiences in teams. A unique feature of this course is that it uses the flipped classroom technique, so students have a hands-on, experiential opportunity to take a deep dive into the concepts of working on a team.

This resource is intended to help faculty new to teaching Group Dynamics understand how we flip the classroom. It should also be helpful to other faculty who are implementing groups in the classroom. It is hoped that this resource will provide you with ideas about implementing the flipped classroom into your teaching repertoire.

Overall, this OER offers a brief overview of the flipped classroom technique followed by an introduction to a specific method of flipping the classroom that is used in the Group Dynamics course at Conestoga College. The resource ends with a review of how teamwork in a flipped classroom environment helps students develop essential employability skills

It should provide faculty with a solid footing to take the next steps in learning how to teach this course using a flipped classroom method, but it should also serve as a guide for other faculty members who want to know about this teaching style.



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Laura Quirk received her doctorate through the Tri-University doctoral program, which utilizes the expertise of the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and the University of Guelph. Her PhD is in history with minors in archaeology and gender.

Laura has been a professor at Conestoga College since 2010 and has taught and trained faculty how to teach Group Dynamics since 2012.

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INTRODUCTION



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In this resource, you will learn what a flipped classroom is and the benefits and challenges of this type of classroom experience. You will also gain an appreciation of the flipped classroom model used for the Group Dynamics course at Conestoga College and how it helps students acquire essential employability skills. After you complete this resource, you should be able to implement a flipped classroom when you teach Group Dynamics at Conestoga College.

Learning Objectives

After reviewing this unit, you will be able to do the following:

1. Understand flipped classrooms.
2. Describe the model of a flipped classroom used by the faculty at Conestoga College.
3. Explain how to use the flipped classroom model to teach the Group Dynamics Course.
4. Illustrate how using the flipped classroom model to teach groups contributes to the students' Essential Employability Skills.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A FLIPPED CLASSROOM?



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What is involved, and how complicated is it? These are all questions you might be asking yourself, particularly if you are unfamiliar with the concept. Let's take a deep dive into what flipped classrooms are all about.

In traditional classes, students learn and acquire content through in-class lectures and do the more difficult work of applying the content by themselves on homework assignments outside of class. Flipping a class reverses this, moving content acquisition or passive learning outside of class and moving the application of content into the classroom where students can benefit from the presence of the instructor and their fellow classmates as they learn. As such, a flipped classroom promotes the experiential learning approach because students are encouraged to learn by doing and thinking for themselves. In a presentation by Michael Sweet of Northeastern University, he explains that in-class application activities are at the heart of the flipped design. These are

activities that are facilitated by the instructor — that students can work on together — because they’ve been held accountable to prepare for the task by engaging with out-of-class material ahead of time (Academic Innovations & eLearning, 2016, 31:00-32:00).

A central goal is to provide more time for interactions with students in class. Teachers can do this in various ways and with different degrees of adoption, ranging from just a few class sessions a year to a complete reconceptualization of a course (Bull, Ferster, & Kjellstrom, 2012). For the faculty, this is a different skill set than lecturing. Facilitating a learning experience is not about being the lead role actor, it’s about being the director — which means you’re not in the spotlight, you’re off stage (for the most part). When working together, students can explain things to each other in ways that an instructor can never think of. Sometimes, a person who has just learned something is the very best teacher because they remember what it’s like to have the misconception of “yes, I was thinking of it like that too, but you can’t think about it like that; you have to think about it like this.” Collaboration is powerful for peer-powered learning (Academic Innovations & eLearning, 2016, 23:00-26:00).

Flipping the classroom is not about homework in the classroom and classwork at home. What it is really about is the lower-order thinking skills. These are the skills that students can do at home: they are the remembering and understanding aspects of learning that they are capable of doing on their own. Students can get that aspect of learning through video lessons, book lessons, or any combination thereof. The important part is that the instructor has some kind of assessment to find out how well the student learned that information. It is not just something that the instructor can find out about but something that gives students feedback so that they know how well they learned that information.

According to Dr Lauren Rosen, students advance to higher learning thinking skills when the instructor has time with them — these are the parts where students really need an instructor’s support. These are the parts that they struggle to do on their own. So, in the in-class or synchronous parts of learning, the instructor helps students by being a mentor and guide. Instructors help students to be creative in finding their own solutions to problems faced in the lessons. The idea of flipped lessons is really getting the students to work at their own pace and learn in the ways that make sense to them (Technology Innovation Center, 2020, 3:00-4:30).

The loud and grumpy students are going to say that they are teaching themselves. You’re going to hear, “I’m paying to teach myself. You’re not doing anything. I’m paying to hear from the expert and not my friends.” To dispel such misconceptions, there does need to be some explanation upfront about the rationale for utilizing this approach and about why it is better for learning. And what’s great is that there’s a lot of research on it. Students can work together because they’re being held accountable for doing their part of the project outside of the classroom environment. Not doing so would let the team down and may result in lower grades (Academic Innovations and eLearning, 2016, 26:00-27:00).

Lage, Platt, and Treglia, in their exploration of the “flipped classroom,” found that students generally preferred the inverted classroom to a traditional lecture (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2001). The new breed of students in higher education has access to technology at all times and expects to have access to content when and where they want it. The idea that lecture content can be accessed on their own time outside of the

classroom and that face-to-face time is used for further exploration appeals to those entering higher education today. Daphne Koller of Stanford “...found that classroom attendance doubled when she used class time for group problem-solving sessions instead of lectures” (Bull, Ferster, & Kjellstrom, 2012).

One thing about flipping anything is that you have to be able to know what you want your students to be able to do since it’s an application; you want the students to apply the material; therefore, you have to know what it looks like when students *are* applying the material (Academic Innovations & eLearning, 2016, 49:00-50:00).

The value of a flipped class, then, is the repurposing of class time into a workshop where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities (Academic Innovations & eLearning, 2016, 22:00-23:00).

A course should be “flipped” when the course lends itself to a delivery where hands-on activities, discussion, and case studies can occur in the classroom and build upon the basic content that students can learn independently. Not all educators and courses are ready to make the transition to a “flipped” model. Indeed, a “flipped” classroom model requires buy-in from the instructor as well as the students, which can be a tricky thing to negotiate. (Bane, n.d.)

Benefits of a Flipped Classroom

For years, it was normal and accepted for students to come into the classroom and receive content instruction from the instructor. Students would then take this knowledge and apply the principles on their own time through homework. These general principles of instruction have been challenged with the advent of the digital age and access to content anywhere and at any time. The “Flipped Classroom” is a perfect example of this change.

Furthermore, the role of the teacher is changing. Reigeluth points out that “The teacher’s role has changed dramatically in the new paradigm of instruction from the ‘sage on the stage’ to the ‘guide on the side’” (Reigeluth, 2012). The idea of “sage on the stage” speaks to the old standard in education. The “sage” or instructor would literally be on stage at the front of the classroom and distribute content to students. The change, however, does not stop with the instructor; the student’s role has changed as well. Reigeluth goes on to say that “...learning is an active process. The student must exert effort to learn. The teacher cannot do it for the student” (Reigeluth, 2012). In modern-day education, the student is expected to take more responsibility in their learning, and the instructor is expected to help facilitate this learning. This change has resulted in instructors questioning their instructional methods. (Reigeluth, 2012).

How do your students benefit from the flipped classroom model? Baker and Mitchell have made many important observations about how the flipped classroom benefits the students. First, they noted, “students produce a more polished performance — they work on Um-ing and Ah-ing and forgetting where they were in what they were saying. In other words, distractions are at a minimum.” They go on to say, “When they are actually doing group work, they’re interested, they’re sitting forward and talking to one another, and they

get up to do presentations — and it does force them to get out of their comfort zone of sitting there as a student just sitting and listening to a lecture. They have to actually participate, so they're getting more out of it." (Macquarie University, 2013).

Challenges of a Flipped Classroom

While there are many benefits of a flipped classroom, there are a few possible drawbacks or challenges that should be mentioned. They include the following:

- Your students may find it challenging to navigate and manage all the different personalities, relationships, and skill levels of the individuals on their team. This could result in competition and/or conflict.
- Students may find that the decision-making process is slowed down, as is the implementation process of what the team is planning to accomplish.
- Teams may discover that they are at a stalemate and not able to come to any decision at all, which leads to inefficiencies.

Finally, due to any or all of the above, students may find that there is the possibility of a lack of follow-through, which is seen as procrastination.

Attributions

The section titled “What Exactly is a Flipped Classroom?” is adapted from the following sources:

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THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM AT CONESTOGA COLLEGE



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In essence, the flipped classroom model used by the Group Dynamics course at Conestoga College requires students to prepare the lessons and review feedback and energizer activities in advance of the class. (Energizer activities are discussed in detail in the section on Team Roles.) In a group dynamics class, students are often asked to present in groups. They will come to class ready with their group presentation, which means that they have met at least once to figure out their plan for presenting. (In some team roles, they will have to meet more than once to be successful in their presentations). They also have to be able to provide themselves and others with feedback about how well they achieved their task and fulfilled their designated social role within their team while also actively being engaged in the class.

In this version of the flipped classroom, students are

- asking questions about their learning,
- applying what they have learned through hands-on activities and tasks and
- interacting with one another

except that this learning is *all* student-driven.

This model differs from the model used in other flipped classrooms because the instructors are not running the class. They are not planning the lesson, and they are not trying to find ways to engage the students in the lesson. Instructors observe and provide feedback on what students did well and what they may need to work on. In almost every other type of flipped classroom, faculty play a key part in how the class operates, but not in this case.

Indeed, that is one of the elements that is most difficult for faculty who are new to this method. It is not the instructor's job to fix anything. If the presentation implodes and the team falls apart, it is the instructor's job to tell students what they did well or provide feedback on what did not go well, but it is not the instructor's job to fix the students' problems.

USING A FLIPPED CLASSROOM TO TEACH THE GROUP DYNAMICS COURSE



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Group Dynamics is a course in which the students are put into teams (Executive Team, Teaching Team, Review Team, Energizer Team and Feedback Team). During the class, they undertake team-specific roles as well as individual roles (Leader, Recorder, Reporter and Participant/Analyst). There are five teams, and the practice is to do five rotations (two classes each) so that each team gets to try out every role twice. Additionally, within each team, there are four different roles, and they, too, rotate so that every team member gets to try every role. Completion of two classes is known as a rotation.

Team Roles

Whenever people gather together for workshops, seminars, or conferences, someone or some group provides leadership and direction for the attendees. Within the experiential learning model, the **Executive Team** has this responsibility, much like an emcee. A good facilitator welcomes and seats attendees, ensures each person has the necessary resources for the event (e.g., agenda and timelines), makes people feel comfortable, and coordinates all event details. In the experiential model, the Executive Team serves as the facilitator for the class session.

The **Teaching Team** is responsible for developing and implementing a meaningful, creative, and memorable lesson from the textbook chapter assigned for that class (generally 30 to 45 minutes long, depending on the agenda the Executive team has set out). The team will plan the timing and sequencing of the learning experiences and guide the class through all teaching activities (e.g., discussion, demonstrations, worksheets). Lecturing is only one small part of a good class; indeed, since students learn best by doing, the intent of this exercise is to give students an opportunity to apply what they have learned. Therefore, the teaching team is tasked with creating an experiential exercise that applies the knowledge from the textbook in an engaging manner that involves the participants. Moreover, the experiential exercise must take up a minimum of 50% of the time allotted for the lesson so that straight lecturing is not the norm.

A good facilitator assists students in reviewing the material taught in previous lessons. This is particularly important when the subject matter of the course is interrelated and cumulative. Usually, the facilitator conducts the review at or near the beginning of a new class session. The **Lesson Review Team** has the responsibility in this experiential learning model for reviewing the key concepts and ideas from the previous class's chapter. The review is brief (15 minutes), so it will focus on the most important material from the previous chapter.

Team building is becoming a common practice in the workplace. The **Energizer Team** will lead the class in a short exercise designed to engage the entire class in an activity that energizes individuals and encourages class cohesion (10–15 minutes). This exercise must relate to the chapter being taught that day. The energizer activity can be lively and active, or it can be contemplative and meditative. Regardless of emphasis, the activity must always be inclusive, safe, quiet, and professional.

One of the most important aspects of personal and professional development in group life is the ongoing assessment of individual and group performance. Effective teams measure their performance in terms of both task and social goals. The **Feedback Team** is responsible for assisting the class in measuring its performance in both these areas. The Feedback Team is responsible for planning an activity that permits all teams and individuals to assess what went well in the class and to determine areas for further development.

Individual Roles

In the experiential model, every student serves as **Team Leader** at some point in the course. Each class session

has time set aside (the third hour) for teams to meet and do their planning. While the Team Leader will play a key role during those meetings, they are not responsible for completing all of the work. The following are the specific responsibilities of the Team Leader:

- Call team meetings as required.
- Chair team meetings.
- Develop an agenda and send it out before meetings.
- Ensure that individual members carry out their responsibilities and the team carries out its responsibilities.
- Communicate with other team leaders as necessary.
- Review all group reports and ensure they are properly completed.
- Collect all individual reports at the end of the rotation, including their own leader memorandum, and compile them into a single professional report, including a cover page and a separate reference page.

A written record of group discussions and decisions is very important. Groups of all sizes, in virtually all circumstances, do well to maintain a written record of their meetings. In this experiential model, the **Team Recorder** performs this function for the team. A record is kept for all group meetings, for those held in class and for the meetings held outside class time, including electronic meetings. The emphasis is placed on accurately recording the discussions and decisions made by the group. Recorders must use full, clear, and concise sentences capturing the main ideas discussed and the activities to be carried out.

In the experiential model, the **Team Reporter** typically gives a status report to the other groups, highlighting the progress of their team development. Sometimes, if a team has solved a problem, it may recommend that other teams avoid the problem by taking a particular course of action. Most often, however, the Team Reporter will inform other teams as to the current status of the team and the challenges they are encountering.

Effective team members carefully observe their team in order to assess two important things. They analyze their team's progress regarding tasks to be accomplished, and they analyze the team's social-emotional status. These are the two broad goals of all successful teams: task completion and team development. To help students learn to analyze their team from these two perspectives, the experiential model requires each student to be a **Participant-Analyst** at various times throughout the course. Whenever a student is not the Team Leader, Team Reporter, or Team Recorder, they are a Team Participant-Analyst. By requiring each student to keep their own personal record of the team's progress in the areas of task completion and relationship development, the experiential model encourages team members to monitor these critical aspects of group life. Effective team members know when the team is on or off track in either or both of these areas.

The Role of the Instructor as Consultant

All of the in-class activities in this class take between 1 ½ and 2 hours to complete. The instructor is referred to as the Consultant in this course delivery. Consultants do not teach the lesson or play an active part in the class at all. The Consultant sits back and lets the students run the show. The students must handle any issues or problems that arise without aid from the Consultant (unless there is something dangerous or the class is too noisy). This way, the students learn to handle conflict, deal with issues such as technology failure, set the agenda, and follow a strict schedule for the class. Once the class is over, in whatever time is left, the students go into small groups and plan for the next class. The Consultant visits each team and goes over the successes the team had, as well as any challenges they have encountered. The most important part here is that the Consultant doesn't solve problems or tell the students what to do; the Consultant simply acts as a guide and mentor, not a problem-solver.

So what exactly does the Consultant do? While students are presenting each class, the Consultant watches and takes notes, focusing on specific criteria/expectations that are found in the information given to students for each team role. Here, the focus is on how the team is doing as a whole and not on the efforts of individual team members, with the exception of the team leader. It is imperative that the team leader guides the team through the role that the team is undertaking during the rotation.

At the end of every class, the Consultant posts their notes to the class's course shell, so that all teams can see the feedback that the Consultant gave to each team. This allows students the opportunity to learn from one another's successes and also to learn about areas that need improvement. Students are expected to cite the Consultant Notes in their team reports and in their own Critical Reflection Essay, which is the final assignment in the course and is meant to give the student a chance to reflect on their entire experience in Group Dynamics. This furthers the chances that the students are learning from other teams, as well as their own team, throughout the course.

Practical Application of the Flipped Classroom Model

Rotations

Other crucial pieces of information here include the fact that there is a practice rotation, which is the first rotation of the course. This allows the students to try all aspects of their roles without being concerned that they are going to cause their team to fail. In other words, the first rotation is run as if it is being graded (full feedback and grades are provided so students know what they would have received), but it is not counted in the students' final grades. Only four rotations count toward grades.

Grading

The assessments are the same across all sections, and they can be found in the course Model Shell—this includes written reports from each team member that detail their own experience in the role. The main portion of the grade (80%) is the grade that the team earns over four rotations.

The grade is made up in the following manner for each rotation:

15% Grading your own team

15% Grades from other teams

50% Grade from the Consultant

20% Reports that are written by each team member at the end of the rotation

100%

The final grade is then recalculated to be 20% of the final grade that the team earns together. Please note that all students on the team get the grade the team has earned, except in exceptional circumstances when a team member has either gone above and beyond the rest and deserves a higher grade or they have hindered the efforts of the team in some way, thereby reducing their grade by an amount agreed upon by the team, with the aid of the Consultant.

The final 20% of the grade is made up from a student writing a Critical Reflection Essay. They are given three questions that they must answer by using examples from their own team while drawing on the theory found in the textbook. This is the only graded assessment where the student earns their own grades in this course.

TEACHING ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS WHILE USING THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM MODEL IN THE GROUP DYNAMICS COURSE



Photo by Jopwell from Pexels

Essential employability skills are qualities that employers try to find in ideal job candidates. These qualities are in addition to academic qualifications and include soft skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal skills.

The model of a flipped classroom that is being used by the Group Dynamics course at Conestoga College teaches and reinforces these skills by offering opportunities to students to try out many roles and experiences

that they will be exposed to in their future careers. Specifically, in their role as team leaders, students learn how to lead a team. This requires them to learn how to set agendas, chair meetings, and nudge the team to get their work done on time. In other words, this role teaches them to be effective leaders, communicators, and critical thinkers. It also provides opportunities to strengthen interpersonal and personal skills.

The Recorder's role may seem like it involves just a regurgitation of the events and interactions that occurred in a team meeting, but this role also teaches and reinforces communication skills and information management.

Likewise, the Participant Analyst's main job is to communicate clearly, concisely and correctly, in writing, the issues that arose in team meetings. They also evaluate how effectively each team member processes and presents information to help solve problems that the team encounters. Of course, this role also reinforces and teaches the student about how to handle interpersonal and personal interactions between team members.

The roles that each team undertakes during the course are to teach and reinforce specific employability skills. Members of the Executive team learn to critically assess and solve problems that arise before, during, and after each class. They are also the key players in information management before and during the class. Additionally, they must communicate concisely and clearly what their agenda is and how they are going to have the class stick to the schedule. Thus, they must learn strong time-management skills.

The role of the Teaching team is also valuable in teaching students important skills that are needed in the workforce. This team is responsible for teaching a chapter from the textbook in a creative, interactive manner that is not about straight lecturing. Therefore, they must learn critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They must learn to communicate effectively using spoken, written and visual cues. Additionally, this team must utilize appropriate technology and information systems to produce an experiential exercise that reinforces the lesson for the day. This requires them to do something original and unique each time. Finally, this role reinforces interpersonal and personal skills because it requires the team to show respect for diverse opinions, values and beliefs while also managing their own time and resources.

The Feedback team plays the most important role in this type of flipped classroom. Here, the goal is to help the entire class grow and make positive changes each week. The team is required to facilitate a class discussion using an original feedback tool each week to provide feedback to other teams on how well or otherwise they achieved their tasks and social roles. The Feedback team also provides ideas to other teams about how they can improve moving forward. Thus, the Feedback team must have strong communication and conflict management skills as well as flexible problem-solving skills. The Feedback team also builds an impressive roster of interpersonal skills by being aware of diversity, equity and inclusion.

This model of a flipped classroom gives students ample opportunity to try all the roles, both individually and within a team, thereby allowing the students to learn how to work effectively in a team. This will be important no matter what career path students choose because we live in a world today where everyone is in teams all the time.

REVIEW

Key Takeaways

- In traditional classes, students learn through in-class lecture and apply the content by themselves on homework assignments outside of class. Flipping a class reverses this, moving content acquisition outside of class and moving the application of content into the classroom where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities.
- In the flipped classroom model implemented in the Group Dynamics course at Conestoga College, students plan the lesson and find ways to engage one another in the lesson through hands-on activities and tasks while instructors observe and provide feedback on what students did well and what they need to work on.
- In the Group Dynamics Course students are put into five teams. They undertake team-specific roles as well as individual roles both in and outside the classroom to fulfill their learning requirements.
- By working as part of a team and by fulfilling their individual roles within each team, students learn valuable interpersonal and personal skills that help them acquire expertise that is valued in the workplace.

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GLOSSARY

Energizer Team

This team provides an experiential exercise that changes the participants' energy levels either by calming them down or helping them feel more energized.

Executive Team

This team manages the class by setting the agenda, managing time, and controlling how the class flows overall.

Feedback Team

This team provides reactions to each team's performance on their tasks and social roles.

Lesson Review Team

This team member reviews the lesson that was taught in the previous class.

Participant-Analyst

This team member examines the team's progress regarding tasks to be accomplished and analyzes the team's social-emotional status.

Teaching Team

This team teaches the assigned chapter from the textbook for a particular class.

Team Leader

This is the team member who provides guidance, instruction, direction and leadership to a group of individuals for the purpose of achieving a key result or group of aligned results.

Team Recorder

This team member provides a written record of group decisions and discussions each time the team meets.

Team Reporter

This team member provides a status report to the class that highlights the progress of the team since the last class.