



INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM-ORIENTED WORK

Foundation Course, Roskilde University, August 2011.

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STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

- The process of Problem-based group work.
- Interaction and the roles of students and supervisors
- The group work
- The exam

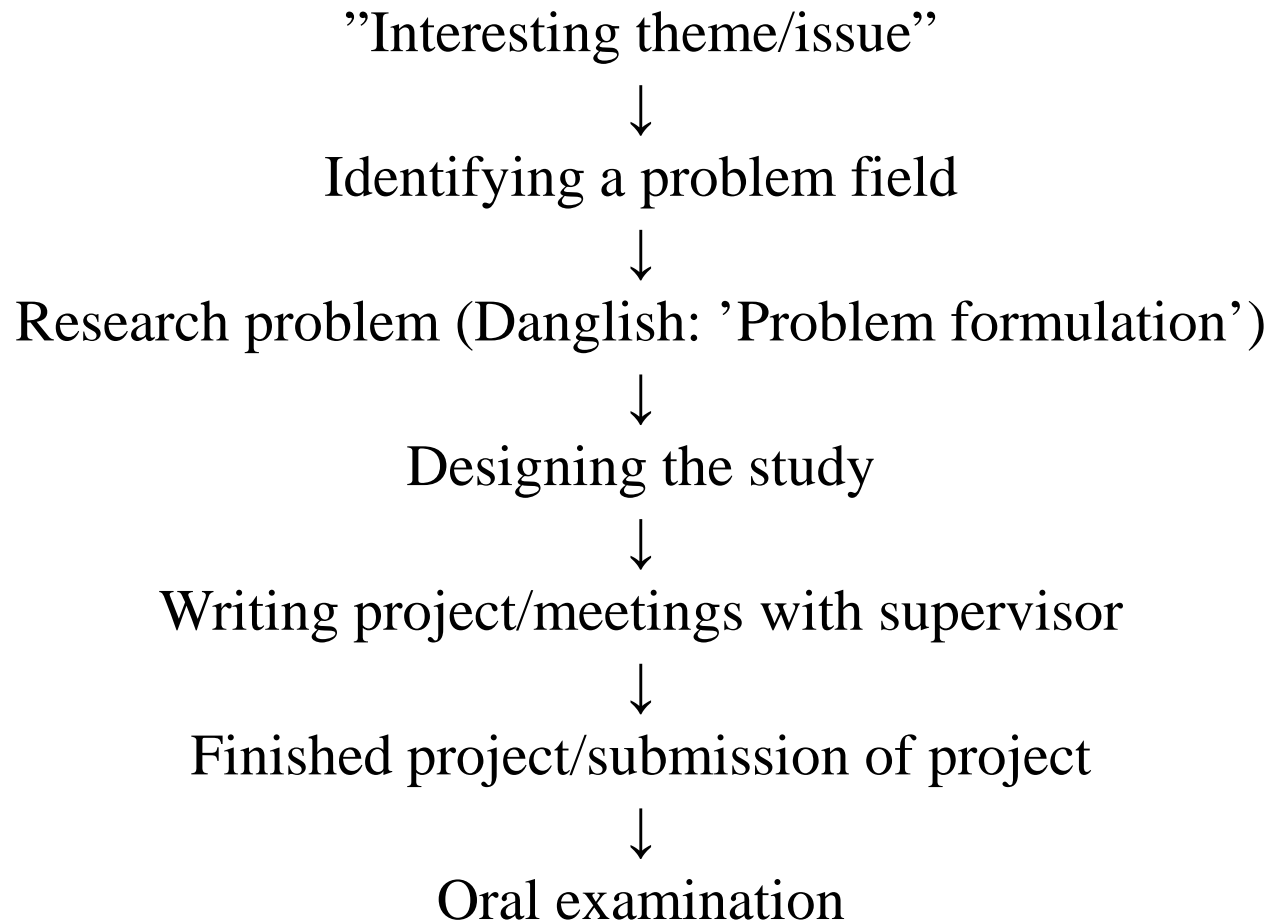


PRINCIPLES OF GROUP WORK

- Problem-orientation
- Inter-disciplinarity
- Guided by the participants themselves
- Group organisation



THE 'NORMAL' PROCESS OF PBGW



THE (IDEAL) ROLE OF THE STUDENT(S)

Student – not pupil!

- Active and committed
- Independent
- Responsible
- Sticks to agreements
- Critical in a constructive way
- Full-time student



THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

- Consultative role rather than a teacher (or a 'pedagogue')
- Qualified discussant (in terms of disciplinary matters such as e.g. theory, methods, design)
- Coach during the process
- Examiner

- However, the supervisor has *less* responsibility for:
 - Solving internal problems within the group.
 - Solving individual problems among the students (s/he is not a traditional tutor!).



INTERACTION BETWEEN THE PROJECT GROUP AND THE SUPERVISOR

Good practice:

- A regular dialogue between the group and the supervisor
- All sorts questions can be raised
- A critical but constructive dialogue
- Responsibility (stick to agreements)
- Clear agendas before meetings

Bad practice:

- Excuses
- Cancellations/postponements of meetings
- Unproductive periods in-between the meetings
- Not submitting any written material prior to meetings
- 'Taking turns' at attending the meetings with the supervisor
- Perceiving the supervisor as the problem-solver



PROCESS AND REPORT

Project work	Project report
Cognition	Presentation
Process	Product
Fragmented	Coherent
Working papers, drafts	Chapters
Feedback	Assessment
Supervisor	Examiner



GROUP FORMATION

The ideal RU principles of the good group formation:

- Theme, research problem and other academic interests shall be the basis for the group
- Openness to alternative ideas
- No groups are formally formed before everyone are member of a group

However, the real group formation involves:

- "The Lemming effect"
- Social and life-style issues determines the constitution of the groups
- "Closed processes"
- "The fear of becoming excluded"
- "Social-darwinist behaviour"



THE RESEARCH PROBLEM – DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROBLEMS

- Anomaly – something (new) which deviates from the present situation or existing norms.
- Paradox – an anomaly that affects our existing schemes of values and understanding of reality
- Planning/policy problem – lack of knowledge about how to solve a problem
- Normality problem – to question our normal understanding of existing norms.



THE PERFECT RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Challenging for others than yourself
2. Guides the rest of the project in terms of choice of theory, methods, data etc
3. Feasible in terms of access to data, possible to operationalise, and one complying with the limited scope of time.
4. Interesting.
5. Clear, concise and without a hint of ambiguity
6. ONE research problem.
7. Within the realms of the aims of your study/discipline



GROUP WORK AND GROUP DYNAMICS

- Group work is a real challenge to your social abilities.
- Clarify your mutual expectations in the groups ('contracts')
- Make sure that all group meetings are well prepared, organised, minutes are taken, and the session is preferably evaluated.
- Put down an agenda and a division of labour prior to all meetings.
- Agree about what is expected from everyone prior to the meetings.
- Write as much as possible all the time.
- The keywords are: active listening, recording of decisions and conflict resolution.



SOME SPECIAL ADVICE TO NON-DANISH STUDENTS WHO ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE RU METHODS

- Join a group with mixed nationalities
- Remember that the RU group-work methods are founded in a very Danish context. If you have got a problem with the group work it is perhaps not necessarily a personal problem
- If you have got any ideas about the research problem, theory etc – write it down and distribute it to the others. The articulated idea is always superior to the just brain-stormed idea
- Write as much as possible.
- Do not feel subordinated when your fellow Danish students start to mumble about "philosophy of science" and do 'name dropping' – they haven't got a clue what they are talking about!
- You are allowed to write your own project (single-person group), but it is not recommended.



PROJECT EXAMS

- Something which was forced upon RU by the Government in the 1970s and 80s.
- Not an integrated element of the RU model, but something which gradually has become an important element of the group work
- RU had group exams until 2007 (after which they were banned by the Government).
- All exams are individual (even though the project is a collective enterprise)



THE 'NORMAL' EXAM

- Oral examination: "*Viva Voce*" Style
- One 'Examiner' (the supervisor) and one 'Censor' (most often external marker)
- Five minutes of introduction/presentation by the student.
- 20 minutes of 'dialogue' between the student and the two examiners.
- Five minutes of 'deliberation' between the two examiners (the student walks out)
- The student is called in and receives the grade
- 7-grade scale (equivalent to the European A-F)



ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF A PROJECT

- Is the subject/the research problem relevant?
- Is the research problem consistent?
- Is the research problem answered?
- Is the argument consistent and coherent throughout the whole project?
- Does the project apply relevant theory?
- Has the students understood the theory?
- Does the project entail any methodological considerations?
- What is the quality/relevance of the empirical data?
- Are the formal elements in order (references, structure, etc)
- Is the language ok?



SOME ADVICE REGARDING THE PROJECT EXAMS

- Make sure you know the study's official requirements prior to the exam
- Make sure you know the project (and the literature you are referencing)
- Never blame other group members for the shortcomings by saying: "I didn't write that".
- Equally, you can be open with that you perhaps disagree with some of the arguments/findings in the project (It's an individual exam).
- Try to go beyond the realms of the project. What alternative directions could have been interesting to investigate? Is there something that could have been improved if you had had the time/resources etc?



ANY QUESTIONS?



THANKS AND GOOD
LUCK!

