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Students form, norm, storm and perform? What if they don't - exploring the realities of student project groups

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Why worry?

Students increasingly involved in groupwork and projects

Limited evidence on what student project groups actually do

- Do we know how student groups really work and develop?
- Is the dominant model of forming, storming, norming and performing an accurate description of many or most student groups

How do staff best intervene to support student project groups?

- Can we trust the dominant model?

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The dominant model

The stage	What happens	Tutors should ..
Form	Members are confused and hesitant; state of dependence	Support social blending
Storm	Conflict over ‘what’ and ‘how’	Make sure it stays in control
Norm	Norms and roles develop	Check it develops ok
Perform	Group performs to capacity	Provide expert advice

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Alternative Models

Alternative models	What happens	Tutors should …
Punctuated equilibirium	Start straight away Mid-point crisis	Check first few days/week Halfway review
Alternating stages, e.g. Sparks	Groups flip between stages in no set order	Monitor continuously Intervene relative to state of the group

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The Exercise

Week 2

- Level 3 students are randomly formed into groups and assigned a topic. Briefed as to the exercise and instructed that there should be a minimum of at least 3 group meetings and minutes of each meeting should be taken.

Week 7

- A formative meeting is held with one of the two members of staff who will mark their poster. Student have to produce an action plan to demonstrate how they will incorporate the formative feedback.

Week 12

- Poster assessed by two members of staff

Group communication facilitated by the formation of Blackboard E-Mail groups for the students and the tutor.

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The Study

30 question questionnaire given to all student which they were asked to fill in at two week intervals. Responses were from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

High level of response (all groups) facilitated by regular E-Mail reminders.

Questions designed to reflect three separate descriptions of group behaviour.

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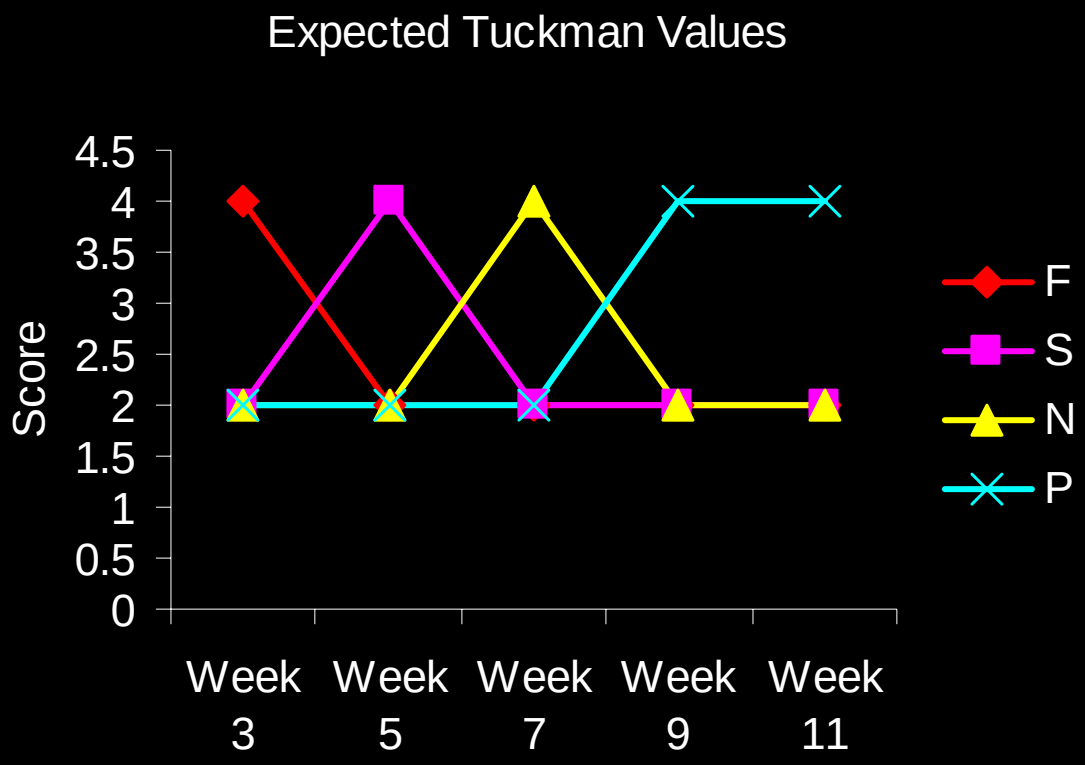
What if Tuckman were true?



Expect an sequential peaking of the various group attributes

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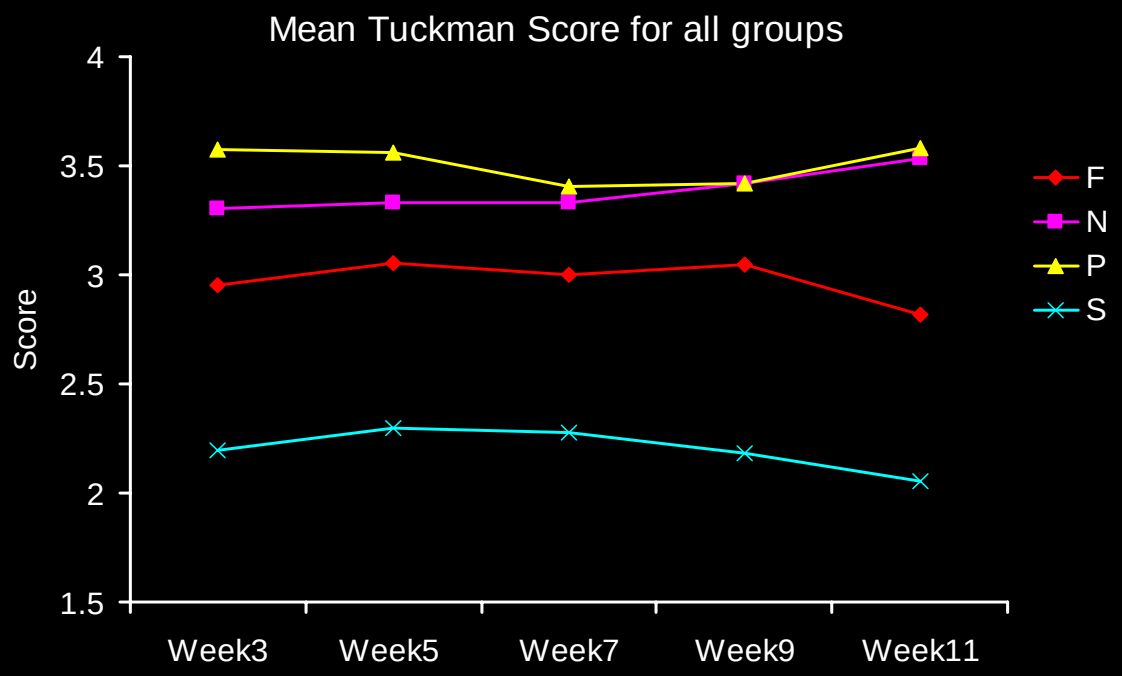
Tuckman overall



No evidence of peaking of the self-perception of any of the group behaviour traits

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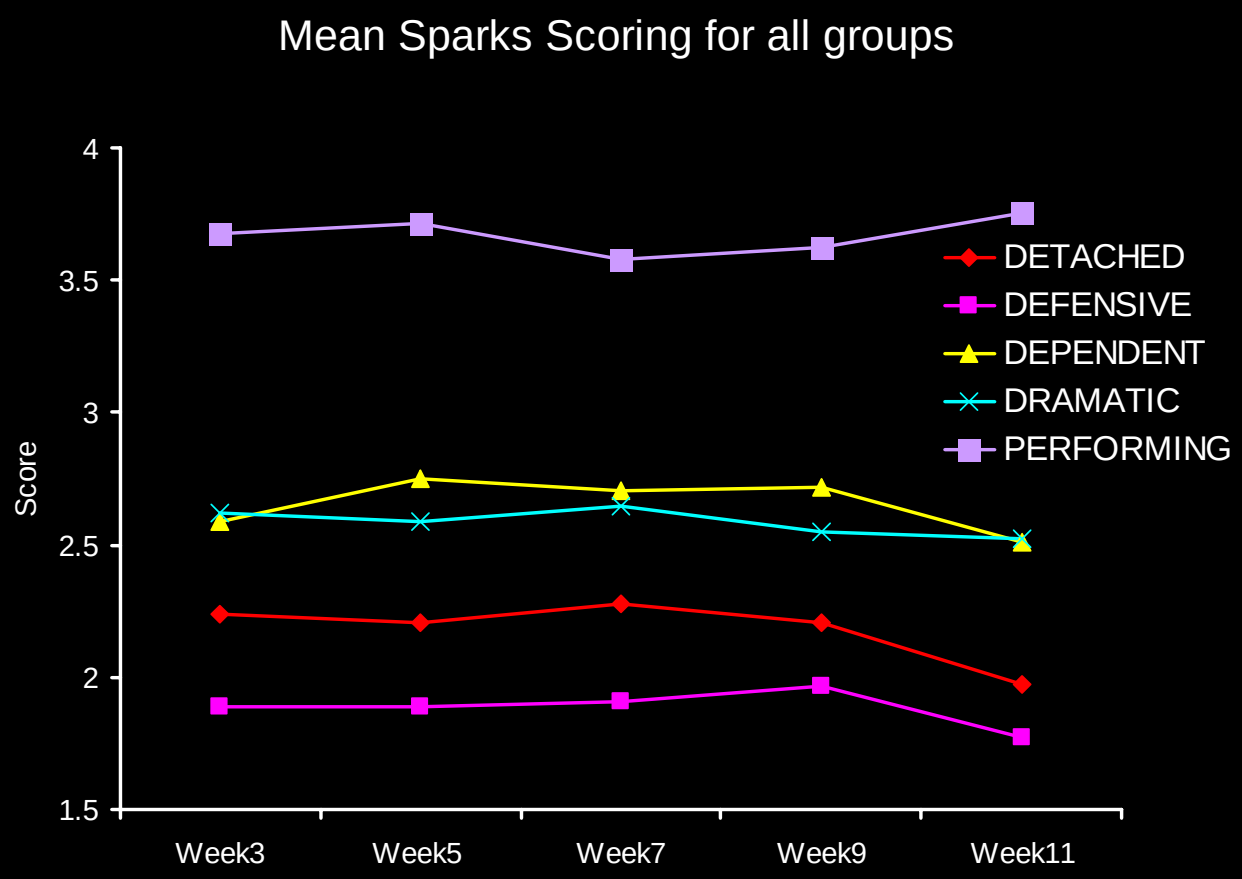
Any Sparks?



High performing scores and low score for the characteristics of dysfunctional groups.

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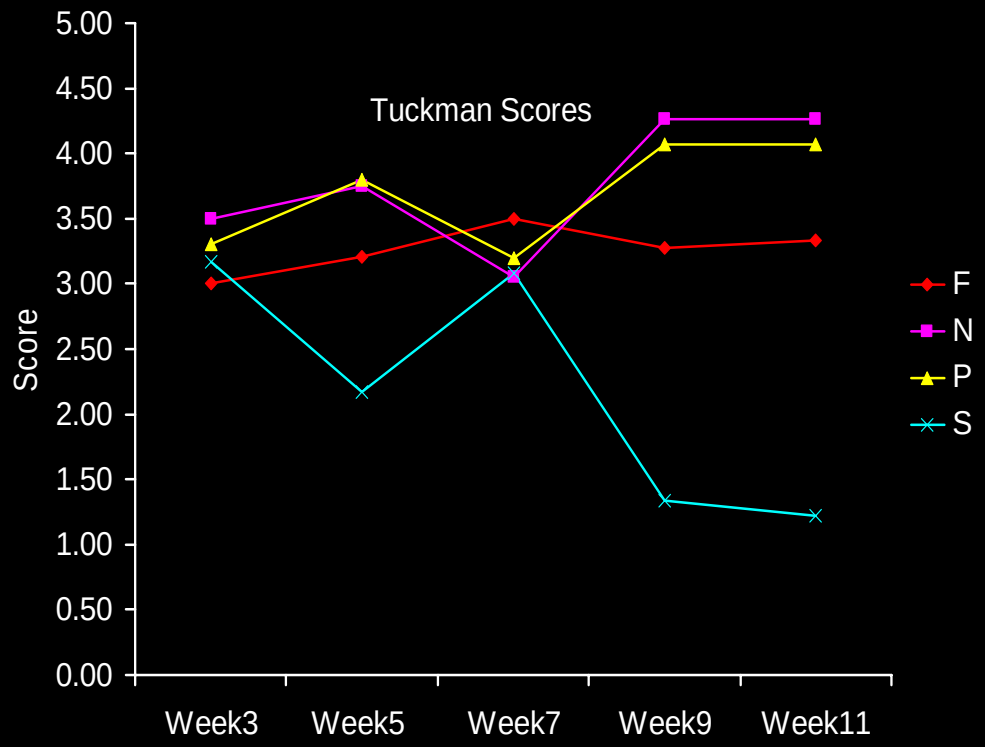
A group in which intervention appeared to work



Increase in norming and performing coupled with a decrease storming after intervention at week 7

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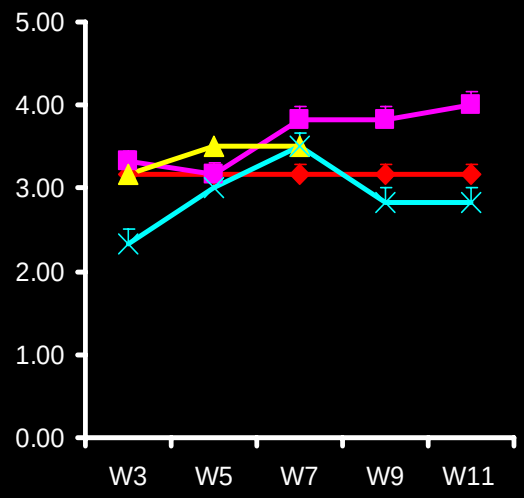
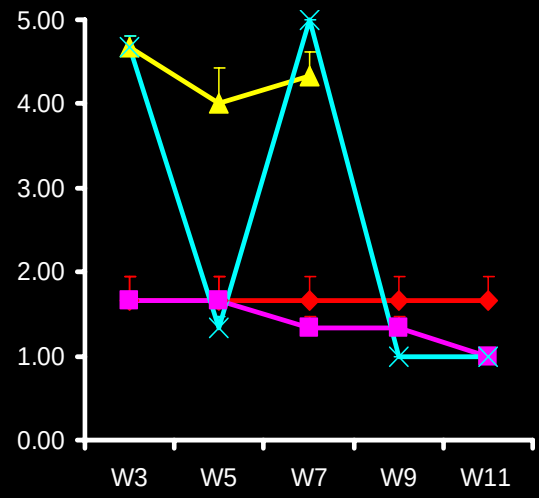
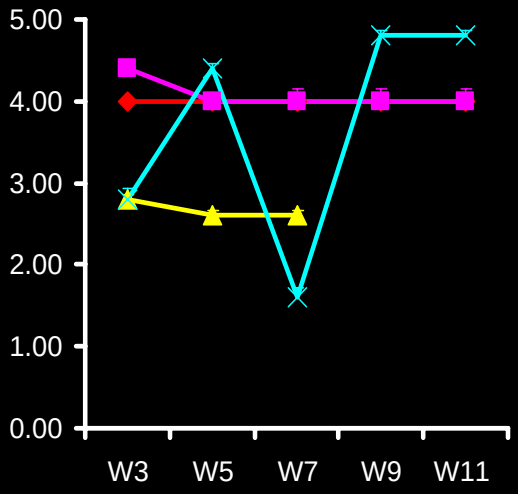
Forming



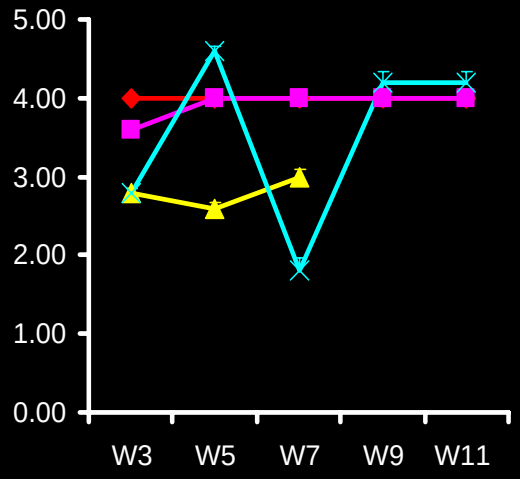
Storming



Norming



Performing



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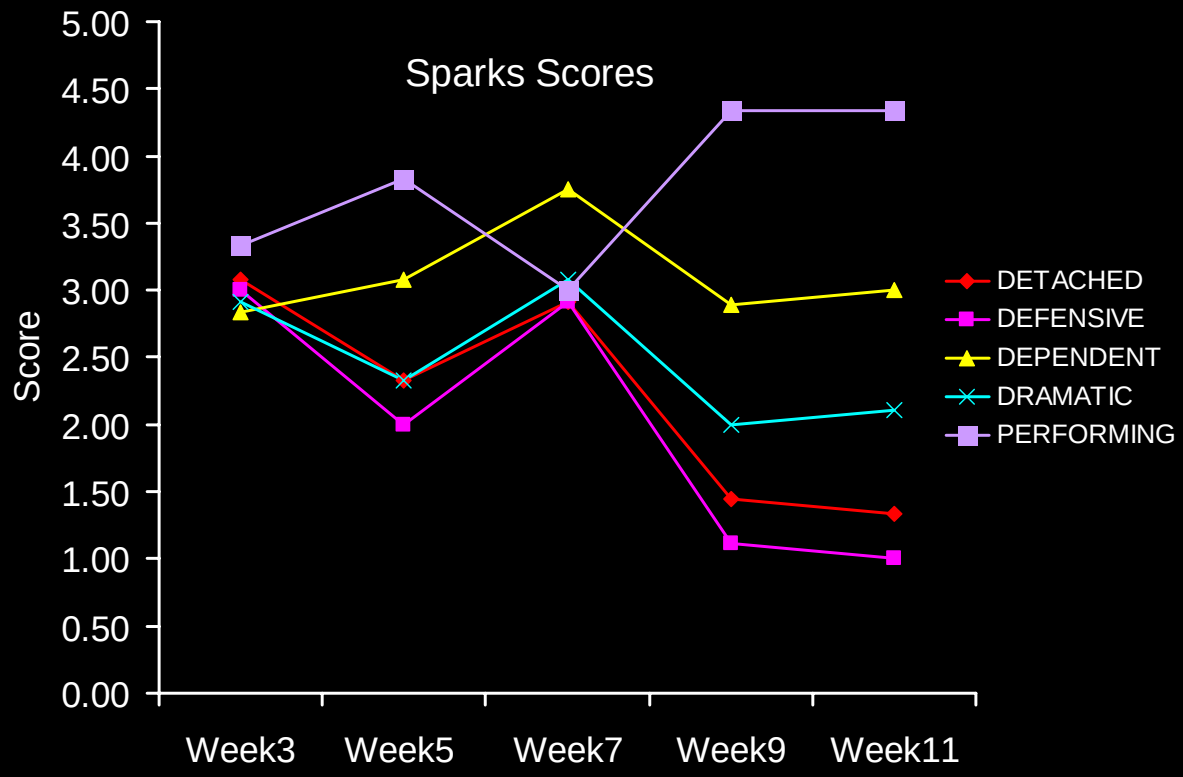

Increasing performing score and decreasing self-perception of dysfunctional group dynamic after intervention at week 7

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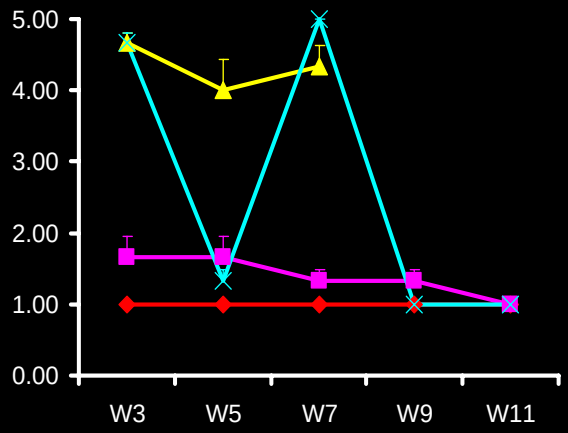
Defensive



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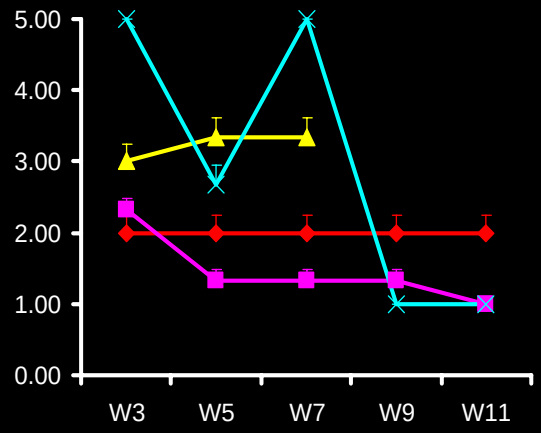
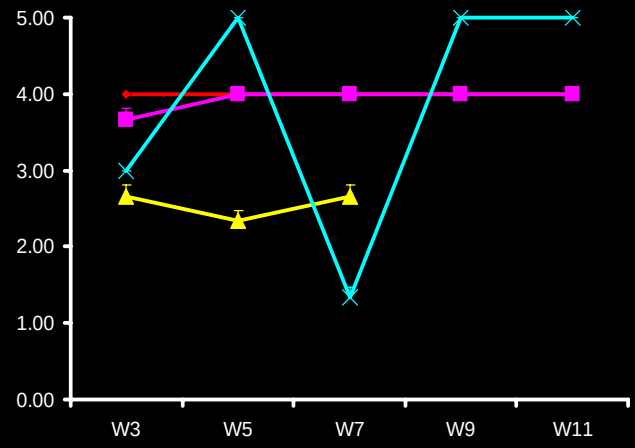


Performing



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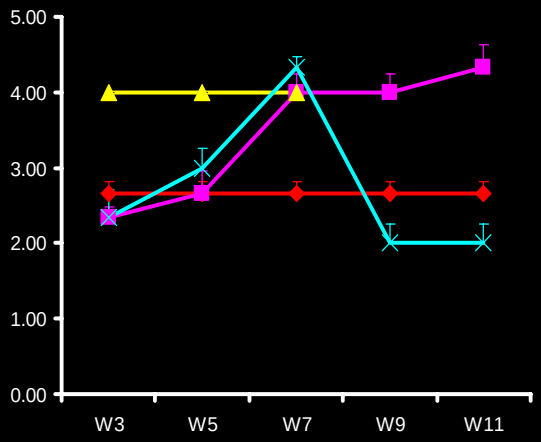
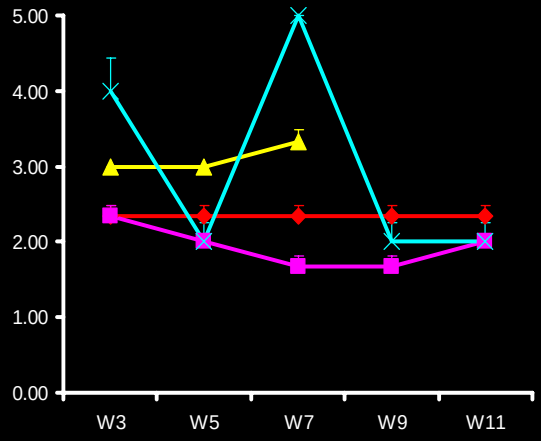


Dramatic



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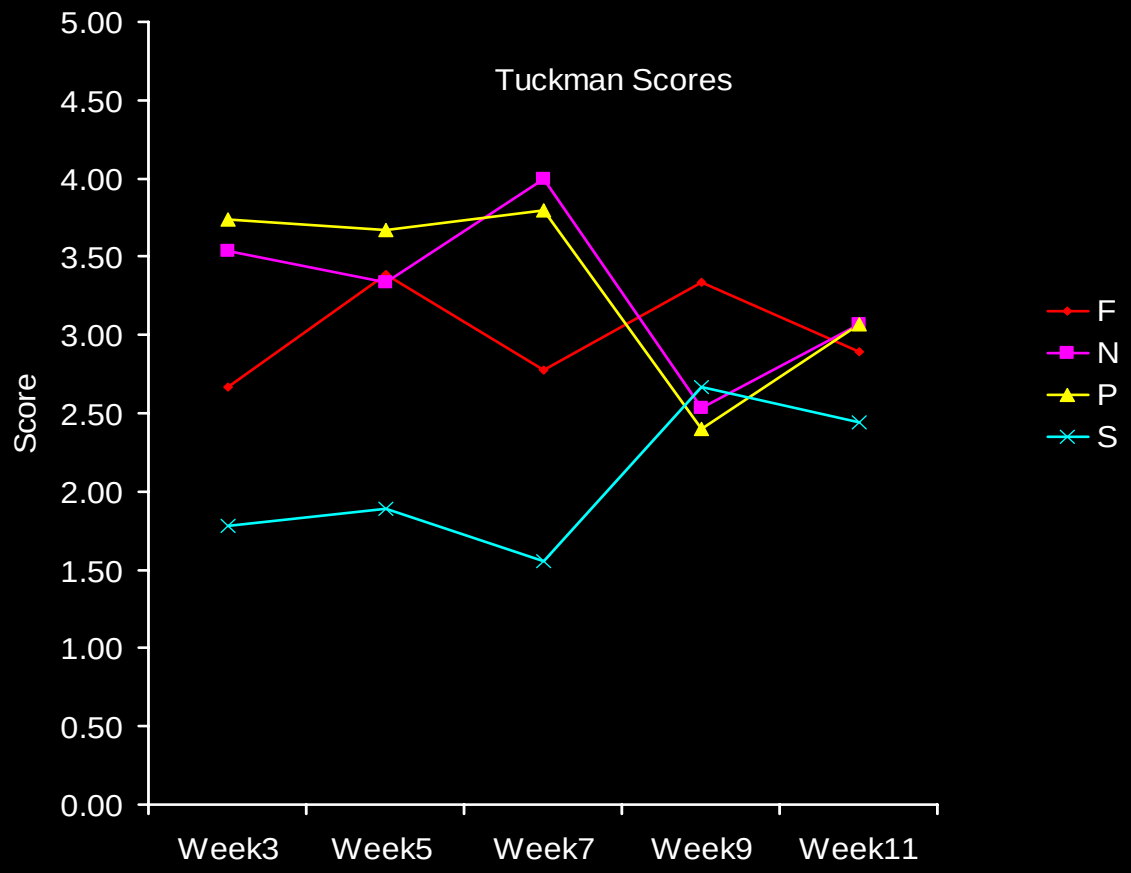
A group in which intervention appeared not to work



Decrease in norming and performing coupled with a Increase storming after intervention at week 7

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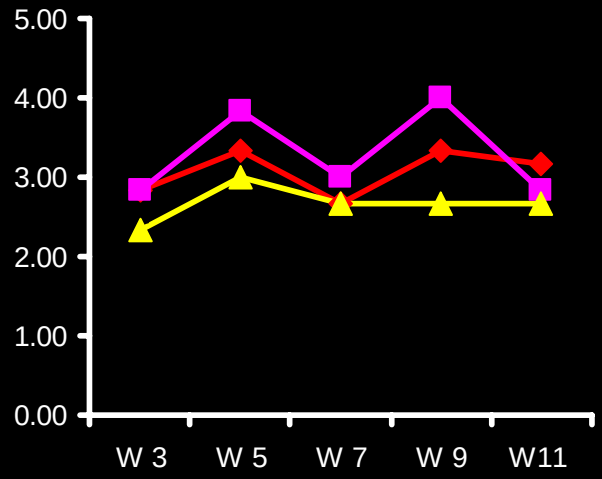
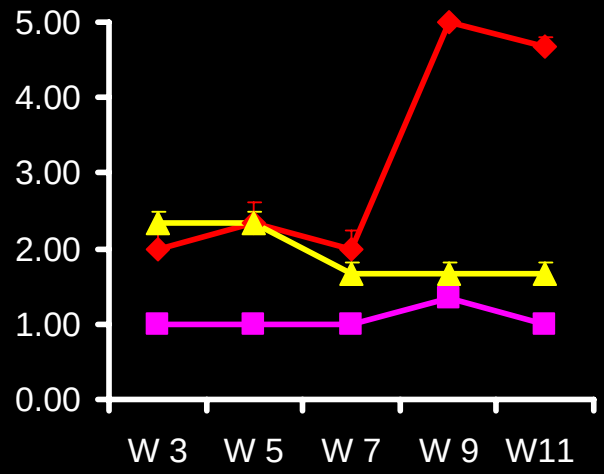
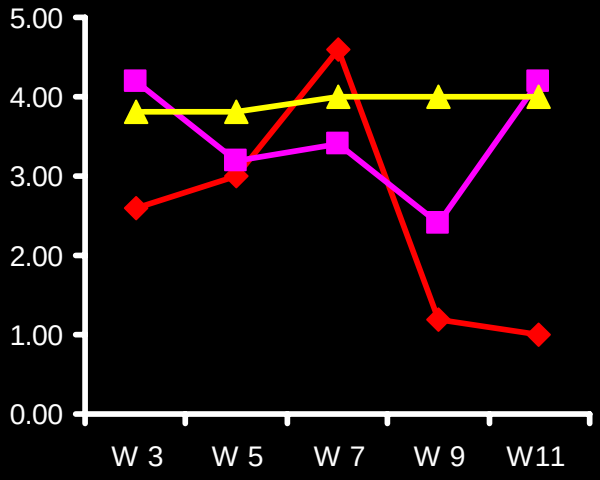
Forming



Storming



Norming



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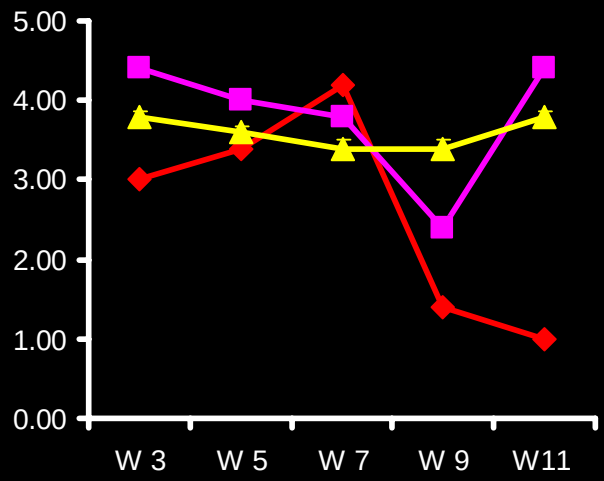

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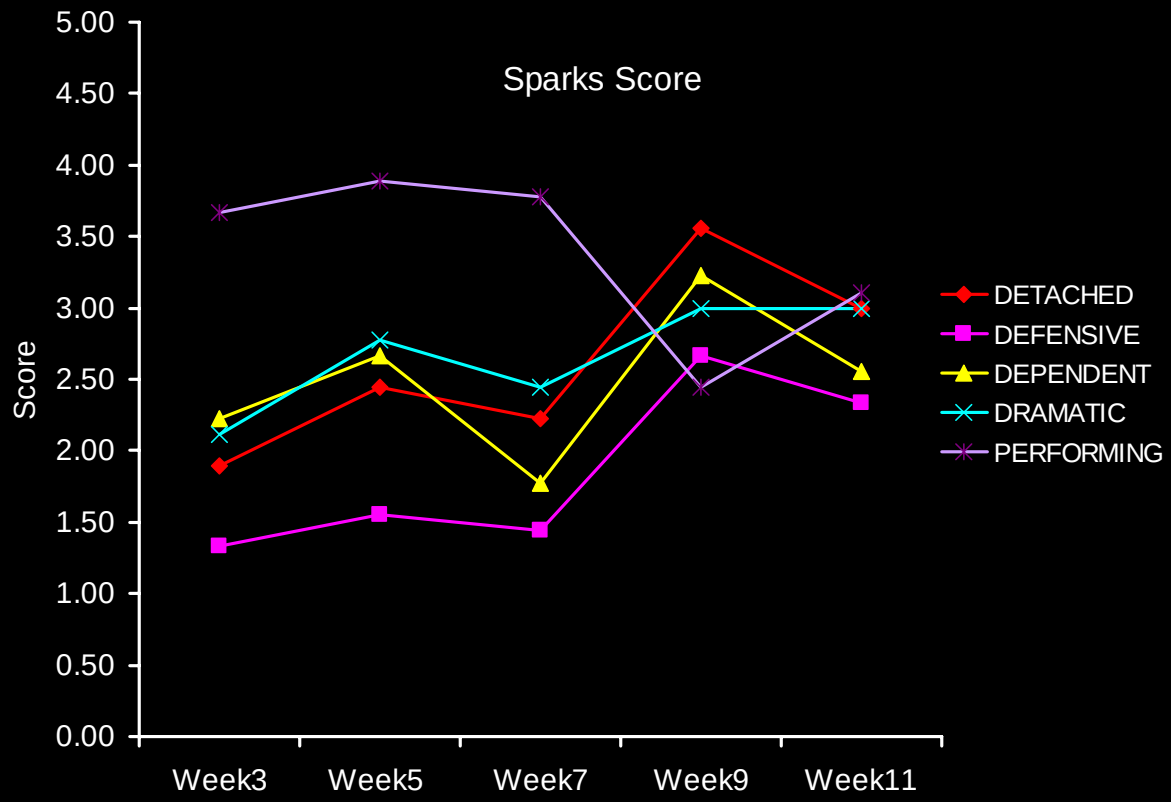
A group in which intervention appeared to not work



Decreasing performing score and decreasing self-perception of dysfunctional group dynamic after intervention at week 7

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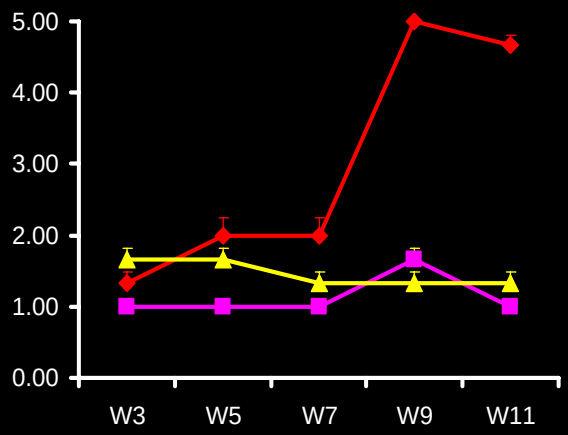

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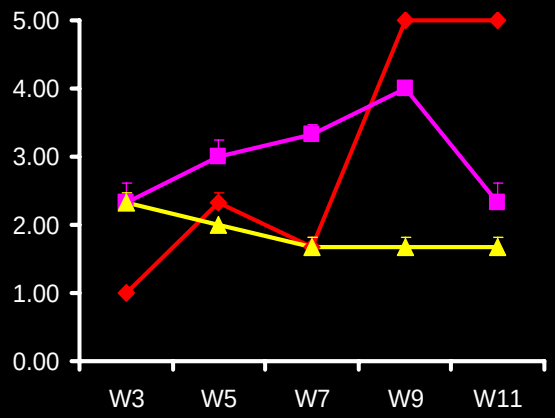

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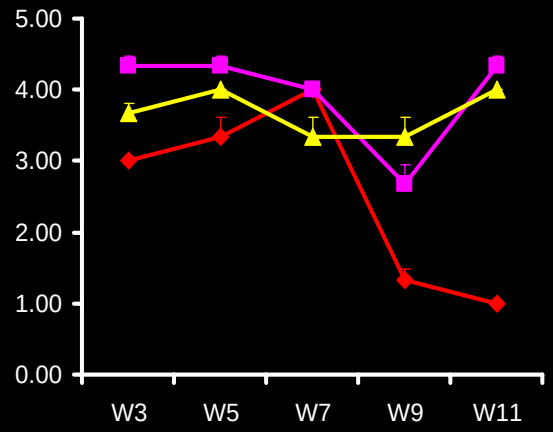

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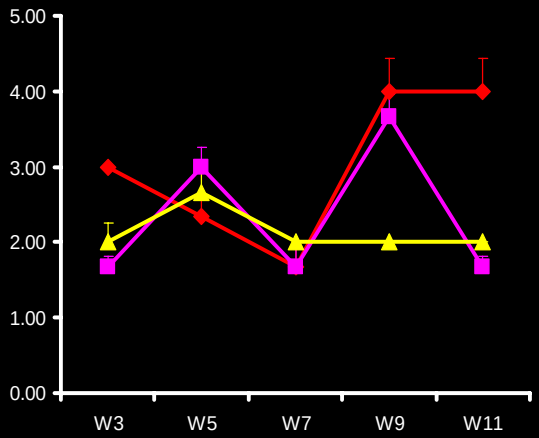
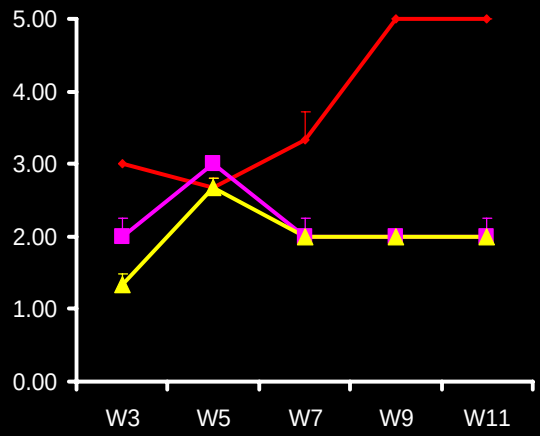


Dramatic



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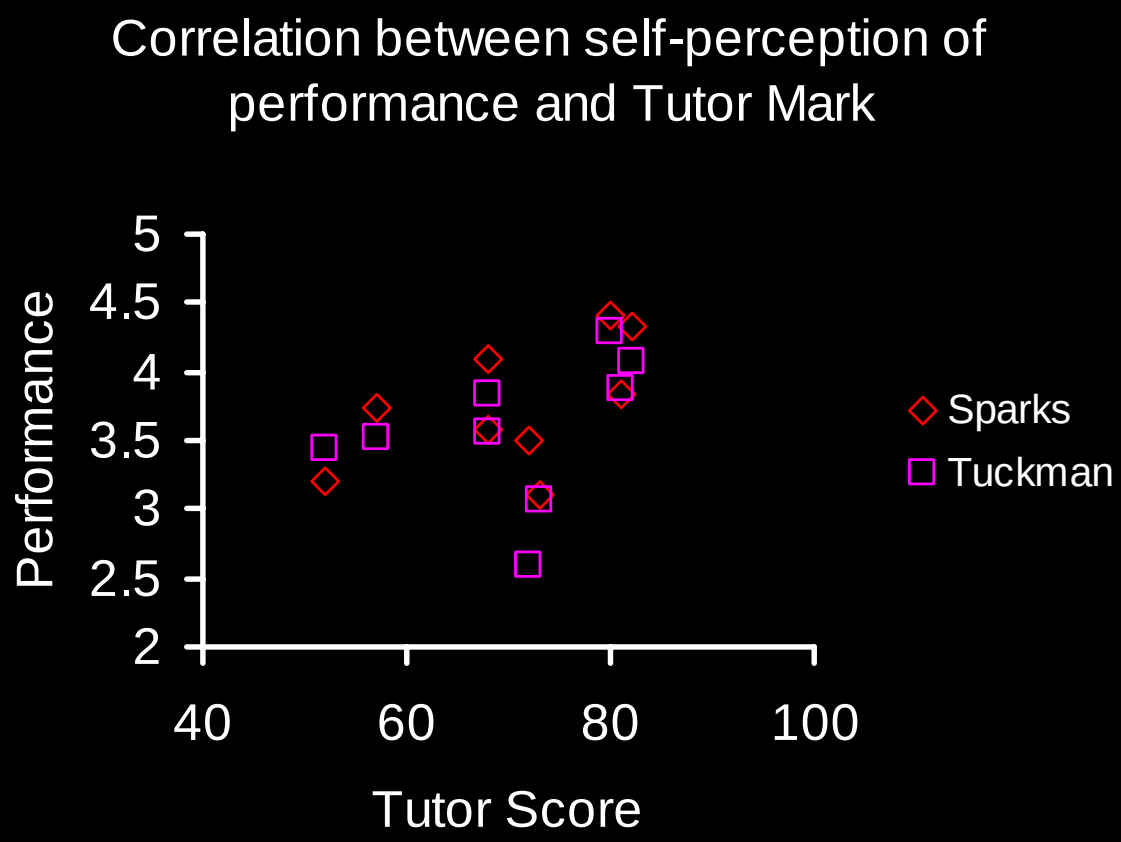
Does self-perception of performance correlate with mark



Higher performing scores appears to correlate with increased mark.

Group with a apparently poor effect of intervention is the an exception

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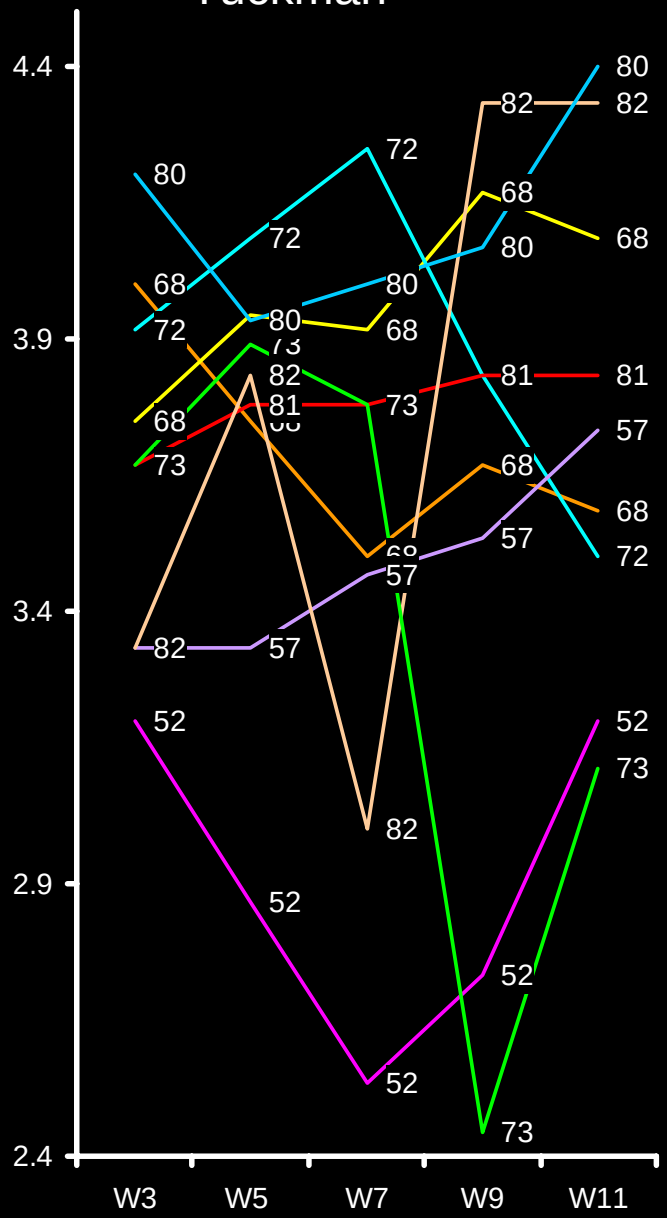
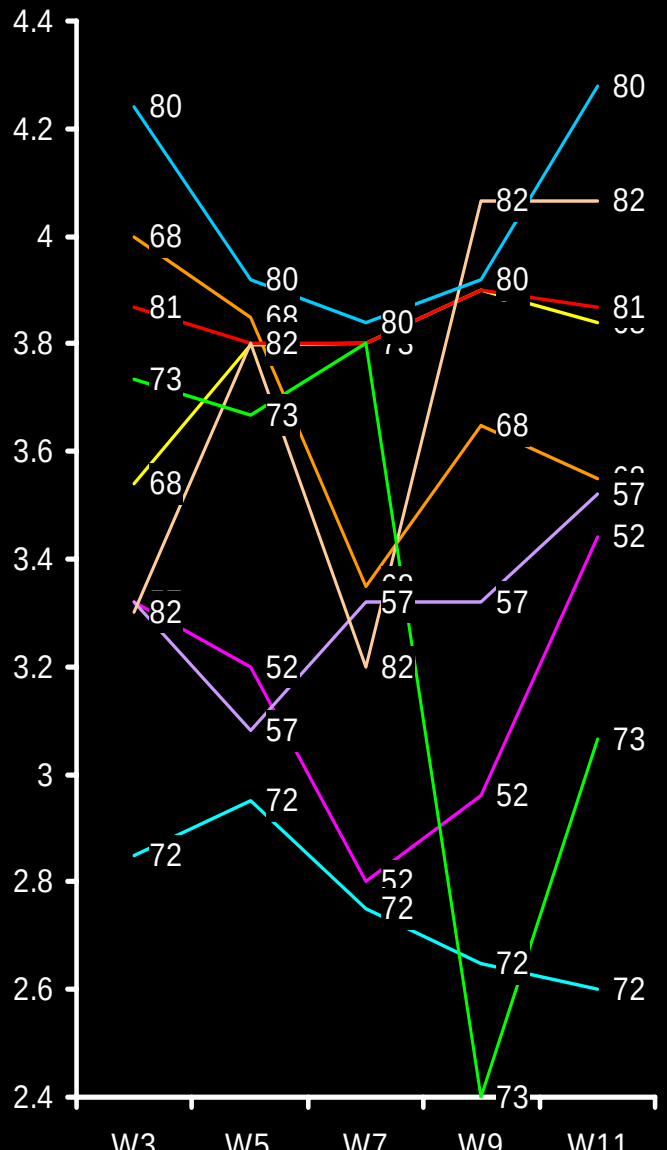
Self assessment of tutor performance against the tutor mark

Tuckman



Sparks



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Conclusions

Theoretical:

- The dominant models of group development do not look very robust when applied to student groups
- But we must be wary of the limitations of self-report (an area for future research)

Practical: Best to ‘play safe’ so:

- Early monitoring essential
- Halfway review (but this *can* have negative impact)
- Intervention based on diagnosis