

5 Jessica

If Kelly goes on about her kids any more I'm going to scream. Why do some students think their lives are so fascinating and relevant to the course? Does she think we've never been in families? Why doesn't Paul shut her up and get us back to the topic? Why is it always just one or two going on about whatever's on their minds, while the rest say nothing?

6 Amir

Why doesn't Gina take more control? We drift around all over the place and never get back on track. Except we always end up hearing about her PhD – and you get rubbished if you don't agree with her point of view. She so loves those creepy guys who suck up and act like she's brilliant, just to get good grades. And if you ask about something she doesn't know, she just twists it around to something she does.

7 Aleena

We never seem to get to the heart of anything. People just say what comes into their heads, pretending they know about things when they obviously haven't understood the reading. I don't feel I'm learning a thing.

8 Callum

It's so patronising, the way they assume you want to join in their smug little world, with their deliberately obscure questions – and only the tutor's answer is ever good enough. He thinks I want his approval. I'll be earning twice as much as him in a few years and the rest of this lot. Does he really think I'm going to answer his question?

Each of the eight scenarios in Activity 7.1 represents an important issue that can arise in discussion groups. There are many ways you might have responded to them. I hope my comments make some useful connections.

1 Not understanding

Daniel: I wish I knew what they're talking about ...

Daniel is feeling anxious. Not understanding is always unsettling. But why does he feel so threatened? Most of the other students are probably as confused as he is. He's bound to feel out of his depth at times. His course *should* be presenting him with lots of new words and ideas. The purpose of the discussion is to tease out what the topic is all about and familiarise him with terms. If he understood everything, there wouldn't be any point in it.

But he needs to join in. He should say that he doesn't understand. Why not ask if someone can talk him through an example to show what the topic is about. And if he still doesn't get it, he can ask again. The session belongs to him as much as anyone else. It's his education. His fees are worth the same. He should make sure he gets some sense out of each session. Anyway, clarifying things will be just as helpful for the other students. It's much better to err in the direction of over-clarifying, than have people sitting about