

Small Group Teaching

Effective Teacher Series 2004-2005

January 26, 2005

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Goals

- Understand the “small group” as different from other group learning structures
- Appreciate the advantages and challenges of the small group process
- Reflect on the strategies you currently employ with small numbers of learners

Objectives

- Outline some structures for small group learning
- Explain the importance of the “safe group”
- Describe the characteristics of an effective small group leader/facilitator
- Identify types of problem learners and propose ways of helping them

What is a “Small Group”

- Ideal size 6 to 10 learners
- Facilitator or leader
- Learners are **active**, not passive
- In general, learning tasks
 - extend over time
 - involve process/problem solving
- Goals include acquisition of **skills** as well as **knowledge**
- Appropriate for **adult learners**

Adult Learners

- Learn best when guided by their own questions
- Can be trusted--must be trusted--to direct their own learning
- React better to the “Guide on the Side” than the “Sage on the Stage”

General Small Group Format

- Group receives or identifies the task(s)
- Group discusses the task & related issues, and decides what needs to be done
- Group determines a plan for accomplishing the task (often involves remedying a knowledge deficit)
- Group implements its plan
- Group evaluates its own effectiveness

Structures for Small Groups

- Problem Based Learning
- Reading/Discussion Group
- Balint Group
- Attending Rounds
 - Real-time PBL
 - “Doughnut Rounds”

Advantages of Small Groups

- Teach process (rather than just facts)
- MAY take less prep time
- Synergy--draw on expertise and talents of the members
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Fosters relationships, teamwork and trust
- It's more fun, relaxed

Challenge of Small Groups

- Time intensive, needs scheduling
- Risk of chaos
- Less controllable
- More dependent on personality
- Harder work for the facilitator DURING the process

Role of the Facilitator

- Orient the group to the process
- Guide the group during the process toward achieving its goals
- Establish a safe group atmosphere

Role of the Facilitator

- Move into a coaching role as group becomes more confident of process
- Become resource and reality check
- Observe group dynamics
- Identify problems with individual members and help them

What's "Safe"?

- **Safe to LEARN**
 - Safe from error, chaos
 - Safe to explore points of view, take risks
- **Safe to PARTICIPATE**
 - Safe from being crowded out
 - Safe from personal attacks
- **Safe to CONTRIBUTE**
 - Safe from being ignored
 - Safe from having ideas dismissed

Rules for a Safe Group

- Everyone's input important, valued
- Disagree with ideas, not people
- Confidentiality (like Las Vegas, what happens here, stays here)
- Judgment of ideas, personalities, opinions, not appropriate

The Successful Small Group

- Responsibility for maintaining safe group belongs to every member, not just the facilitator
- Group takes ownership of its task(s)
 - Members identify the group's tasks and agenda and distribute assignments
 - Members become co-facilitators, monitoring and adjusting the process themselves

The Effective Facilitator

- Qualities:
 - Intentional
 - Accurately empathetic
 - Genuine
- Skills
 - Flexible
 - Able to maintain the safe environment
 - Restrained: maintain focus on learners, not self
 - Willing to play **devil's advocate**: challenge conventional thinking

Becoming a More Effective Facilitator

- Practice intentionality
 - Prepare, prepare, prepare
 - Anticipate stumbling blocks
 - Have a store of leading questions ready
 - Use “What” and “How” rather than “Why”
 - Open ended rather than yes-no
 - Self-evaluation
 - Did we get where we wanted to go?
 - What worked well and what did not?

Becoming a More Effective Facilitator

- Practice empathy
 - Identify extravert, introvert learners
 - Identify who is NOT participating
 - Bored, alienated, lost, or ill?
 - Consider asking them privately outside the group
- Evaluate own reactions and attitudes
 - ? derived from unrecognized agendas

The Art of Correction

- Factual errors
- Non-participation or over-participation
- Failure to be prepared
- Apparently irrelevant comments
- Inappropriate personal remarks
- Bizarre comments or conclusions

The Art of Correction

- Public criticism of individuals discourages learning and participation
- Lead out of muddy thinking
 - Ask for further clarification, source
 - Help learners analyze the chain of logic to have them arrive at a correct answer
- Simple but important/urgent factual errors can just be corrected w/o personal evaluation

The Art of Correction

- Be alert for impairment
 - Depression/ mental illness
 - Substance abuse
 - Learning disability
- Professionalism issues
 - Respect
 - Judgment
 - Commitment/ responsibility

*May warrant documentation,
intervention and referral*

How This Actually Works

- Differs depending on if one-time encounter or serial meetings (plan accordingly)
- Explain at start:
 - Format
 - Ground rules
 - Your expectations
 - Goals of the exercise

Getting Started

- Identify instructional topic with a problem or approach that needs to be worked out
- Identify issues that need to be investigated/ discussed
- Encourage lists and notes
- Have group decide on assignments if meeting again later

For Example.....

- A 27 year old woman presents to labor and delivery at 28 weeks gestation with contractions and heavy vaginal bleeding. During routine admission consent-signing she declares that she is a Jehovah's Witness and will not accept any blood products, even in a life-threatening situation.

The Ball Gets Rolling

- You are first in to evaluate the patient; what do you do first?
- History: you can play role of patient “What do you want to know from me?”
- PE: Have them ask for components in order they would perform
- What labs and tests do you want? Why?

What do you think is going on?

- What is your differential diagnosis?
- What would you do next?
- Who would you go to for help?
- What resources might you turn to for information?
- Facilitator can decide emphasis

Value Added

- Behavioral issues
 - Patient
 - Family
 - Health care provider
- Ethical issues
 - Autonomy
 - Beneficence
 - Maleficence

Adapt to Time Frame

- Discuss now
 - Can pre-assign background readings or start “cold”
- Assignments by students for next session
 - Medical knowledge: ddx, diagnostic approach, treatment
 - Prevention
 - Behavioral
 - Ethical/ legal

Outcomes

- Everyone learns...from each other, about each other
 - Information
 - Respect: for patients and colleagues
 - Consensus
 - Privacy
- Facilitator need not be the “expert” on all aspects of a problem

Outcomes

- Group supplies its own energy
- How to approach a problem (process) is key
- Information more likely to “stick”

Summary

- Small Group approach is useful for teaching the clinical process and problem-solving skills
- Keys to an effective small group are:
 - Safe group
 - Adult learner approach
 - Intentional, empathetic, genuine facilitator
- Small group learning can be applied to a variety of teaching settings