

What is Small Group Teaching?

- Defined as “any teaching situation in which dialogue and collaboration within the group are integral to learning”
- 3 components: learner participation, specific tasks, reflection
- Role of the teacher is to facilitate, to coordinate, and to inspire
- Size of a small group varies (1-8), and divides a larger class into smaller groups working together



Edmunds et al 2010, Jones 2013, Mills and Alexander 2013

Large group question:

Why Teach in Small Groups?

- Supports active learning
- Promotes thinking
- Develops learner’s skills (discussing, leading, listening, reflecting, working in a team)
- Allows for sharing experiences and reflections
- Promotes self-directed learning and independence
- Creates an environment of closer contact between learners and faculty
- Is as effective with imparting/sharing knowledge as a large group learning setting
- Our learners are accustomed to small groups

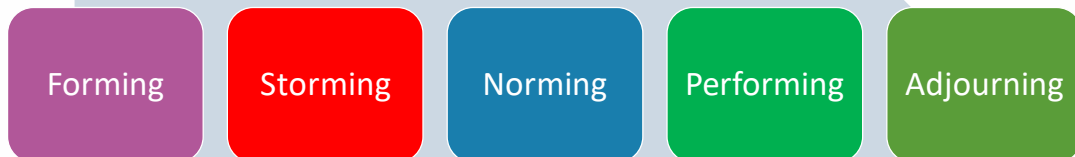


Teaching strategies:

Asking questions throughout your session keeps your audience engaged and allows you to assess knowledge/skills

Edmunds et al 2010, Jacques 2003

Tuckman's Stages of Team Development



Facilitator assists by:

- Providing psychological safety by being open and inviting participation
- Clear expectations
- Acknowledgment of learners
- Avoiding judgements

Tuckman 1965

Effective Small Group Strategies

- Think-pair-share
 - Faculty asks question
 - Think: Learners are given time to think independently
 - Pair: Learners pair up or go into small groups to discuss, debate answers and thoughts to posed question
 - Share: Learners join back to large group and share small group answers and response
- Buzz groups
 - Faculty poses questions
 - Small group brief discussions
 - Rejoin large group, faculty provides answers or presents content

Jaques 2003, Jones 2007

Strategies to Use

- Seating arrangements
- Role assignments (scribe/recorder, spokesperson/reporter, leader, time-keeper, observer, summarizer, counter-arguer)
- Clear group work instructions
- Open-ended questions
- Problem-solving questions
- Problem-based learning, case-based teaching, team-based learning

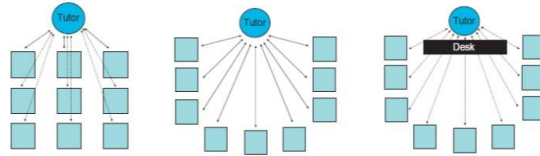


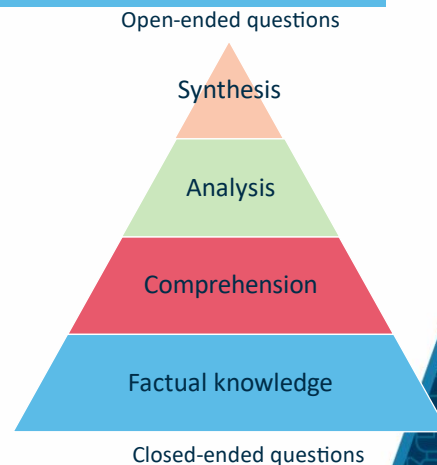
Figure 3. Seating arrangements and direction of gaze.



Burgess et al 2020, Edmunds and Brown 2010, Jacque 2003

Facilitator skills in Small Group Teaching

- Asking questions: arouse interest, assess knowledge, inspire critical thinking
- Use a mix of questions: Lower level and higher-level critical thinking questions
- Advance planning includes preparing a list of questions
- Be prepared to wait for responses to questions: 3 seconds up to 1-2 minutes



Mills and Alexander 2013, Burgess 2020

Additional Facilitator Skills

- Listening
- Responding:
 - Positive and encouraging, promoting safety
 - Reflecting
 - Paraphrasing
 - Checking
 - Explaining if there is a problem understanding a concept, timing is important
 - Summarizing
- Thanking the group(s)



Burgess 2020, Edmunds et al 2010

Some pitfalls/challenges in small group teaching

- Facilitator
 - Talks too much
 - Gives a lecture instead of interactive session
 - Asks too many questions
 - General concerns: providing feedback and different levels of learners
- Learners
 - Not talking to each other
 - No preparation for the session
 - Dominating individual
 - Quiet individual
 - Attitude of learners – accustomed to lectures, being given the answers, wants the solutions, being passive

Burgess 2020, Edmunds 2010, Mills and Alexander 2013

Providing Feedback in Small Groups

- **Incorporate formative assessment**
 - Questioning strategies, low-stakes quizzes, presentation performance
- **Observe and listen**
- **Whenever possible, provide feedback**
 - Think *coaching* – not evaluation
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 - Think *coaching* – not evaluation
- **Peer feedback**



Burgess 2020, Edmunds 2010, van Diggle 2020

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Addressing different levels of learners in small groups

Assign roles

- Appropriate to the level of the learner
- Appropriate to the learner (comfort, safety)

Provide baseline content to everyone

- Pre-session readings, videos, etc.
- Cover content in didactic portion of session

Design open-ended questions and activities

- Share past experiences
- Share reflections

Arrange seating

- Assign and inform
- Learners may already be comfortable with each other

Jacque 2003, van Diggle 2020