An introduction to teaching

Small group teaching

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What is small group teaching for?

1. Applying known concepts or principles to solving problems in new situations
2. Remembering specific facts
3. Analysing information into its constituent elements
4. Evaluating or making critical judgements
5. Organising facts to make sense of them
6. Synthesising or putting together information in new or original ways
Levels of learning

• Evaluation
• Synthesis
• Analysis
• Application
• Memory
Two sides of the coin

Structure
• knowledge components

Processes
• attitudinal components
• reflective approach
• key skills
Before a small group session

- Room layout
- Register
- Plan
- Materials
- Handouts
- Audio-visual aids
- Introductions
- Purposes
- Activities
Starting a small group session

- Arrive first and arrange the room
- Smile
- Introduce yourself
- Icebreaker
- Introduce term’s activities
- Explain session plan
Icebreakers

- Say something interesting
- Introduce a partner
- Progressive name list
- Small group task
The middle of a small group session

- Plan for variation in student activity
- Keep to time but be flexible!
Why might they not take part?

- Unsuitable objectives for group work
  Emphasis on content not process

- Tensions
  Attitudes
to subject
to seminars
to other group members
to group leaders etc

- Gender and ethnicity

- Lack of interest
Why might they not take part?  

- Tutor’s role
  - an authority? in authority? an authoritarian?
- Questioning technique
  - level of questions
  - clarity
  - openness
  - responses to answers
  - giving all the answers
- Voice and “body language”
- Room layout
Why might they not take part?

- Take note of inhibiting factors
- Review motivation
  - link with previous knowledge
  - purpose
  - concreteness
  - clear definition
  - time limit
- Monitor your own practice
  - how long you talk
  - the type of questions you ask
  - obtain accurate feedback on students’ perceptions
Why might they not take part?

• Step out of the picture
• Put students at the centre
  — student presentations?
• Share the responsibility
  — Learning contracts?
• Ask them to reflect on their participation
• Assess participation
Ending a small group session

- Aim to finish early
- Avoid ragged endings - have continuation work ready, if appropriate
- Separate final remarks and packing away
- Refer to next session
Practicals

• Check equipment
• Orderly briefing
  – objectives
  – activity
  – groups
  – safety
• Supervision
• Breaks
• Recording the session
Practical problems

• Experiment does not work
• Equipment breaks down
• A student is behaving in an unsafe way
• An accident happens
Small group problems

- The group is too big for all to participate
- Students do not complete preliminary work
- Bickering between two students
- One student dominates discussion
- A sub-group does not work on the topic you set