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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?

Inhibitors - 1

- **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?

Inhibitors - 2

- 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? solutions - 1

- 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? solutions - 2

- 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