

Effectiveness of Small Group Teaching in a Clinical Setting

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Definition of small group

According to the typical view, a small group consists of a group of 8-12 students who are headed or facilitated by a teacher. Purist view adds to this by saying that the group needs to be focused on a particular topic and needs to adopt a learner centre approach. In a clinical setting, such groups typically consist of a pair of students or 3-4 trainees practically working with a healthcare team [1].

The Teacher and small group

The teacher in a small group setting has a vital role to play in order to ensure effectiveness of the group. It might be argued that a teacher's responsibility in a small group is limited to managing the group, facilitating discussion and engaging participation.

A clinical small group however behaves and functions in a variety of ways. In this regard, the teacher might have to assume additional responsibilities of being a commentator, an individual who imparts education along with facilitating discussion and an individual who might be requested to address any queries that learners might have [2].

Aspects which make small groups effective in a clinical setting

Aspects which help in making small groups apt and effective in a clinical setting include both process and task oriented activities. Also, these aspects bear a direct correlation with the 'Adult Learning Theory'. In this regard, following aspects can be identified [1].

Prior Knowledge- In a small group setting, experience and prior knowledge of all learners is considered and activities are designed in a manner that they build on this knowledge and experiences.

Perceived Learning- Perceived learning objectives of all students

are considered and an apt opportunity is provided for fulfillment of these objectives.

Active Learning- Since participating group is small; it can be actively involved in discussion. Viewpoints can be obtained and effective discussions can be held Critical Thinking- Critical thinking is promoted in a small group setting as various innovative ideas emerge to address a common problem.

Reflective Learning- Reflective learning is encouraged in a small group setting as practical experiences are discussed, feedbacks are obtained and improvements are formulated.

Integration- A small group setting promotes integration of skill and knowledge and allows students to acquire technical skills. It also promoted clinical relevance and practical applicability.

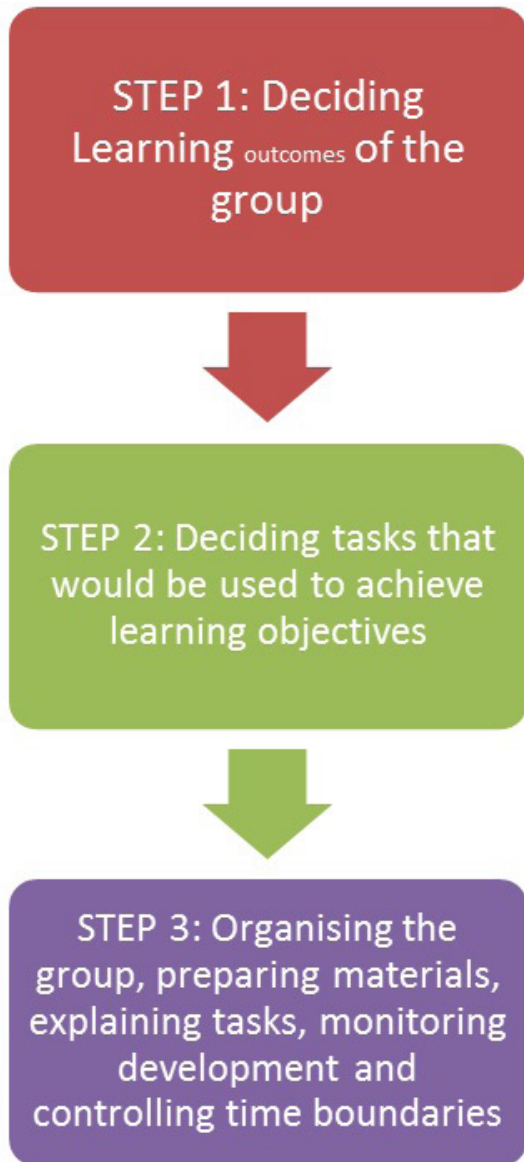
Aspects which hinder effectiveness

Group Approach- If the approach of a small group is teacher centric rather than learner centric, students would not be encouraged to talk among them and discuss matters. Rather, they would have to respond to questions directed towards them and listen to the teacher while he delivers a lecture [1].

Group Management- If the teacher is not able to manage group proceedings in an effective manner; one student might dominate the entire discussion. This would make other members feel dominated or offended and might hamper effectiveness of the group [1].

Lack of Theory- It is important that an appropriate balance is maintained between theory and practice. A group which is completely focused on practical development and encourages innovation might deviate from underlying theoretical knowledge and hence prove ineffective [1].

Planning for effectiveness



Tools which enhance small group effectiveness



Evaluation- Assessment is a necessary component to effective functioning of a group as well as effective learning. Evaluation also enables students to understand the importance of meaningful contribution and respect the opinions of other students [3].

Feedback- Since the group is small in size, individual feedback can be provided. Aspects of personal as well as group improvement can also be discussed [3].

Challenge- An adequate amount of challenge encourages students to think critically and apply theoretical knowledge. Too much challenge on the other hand might serve to de-motivate students [3].

These tools serve well in a small group but render ineffective as group size increases.

As compared to a large group, a small group is much more effective in a clinical setting. Among others, this might also be attributed to effective group dynamics that consists of four broad stages: [3]

Forming- Group members get to know each other, agree on common tasks and issues that need their attention and establish a priority order.

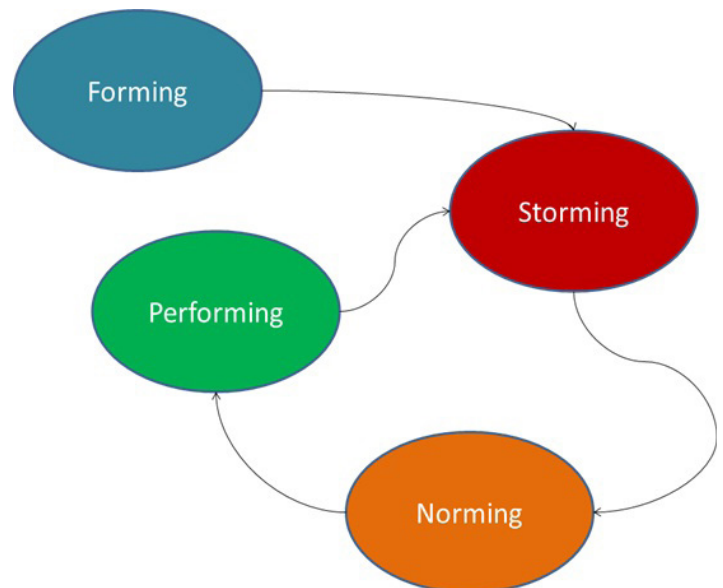
Storming- Group members actively participate in a discussion and brainstorm on various ways by which the issue at hand can be addressed.

Norming- Few key ideas are selected for implementation and an action plan is made.

Performing- Actual implementation of the action plan begins and the issue at hand is addressed.

Group performance is later evaluated and depending upon the degree to which the task at hand is addressed, the group might decide either to go back to the Storming stage or proceed further.

Effective group dynamics



References

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3. Steinert Y. Student perceptions of effective small group teaching. *Medical Education*. 2004; 38: 286-293.