Small Group Teaching

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Objectives

- Look at some of the main characteristics and essential components of small group education

- Discuss the aims, facilitation issues and methods for small group teaching, with reference to your own teaching context

- Describe the role of the teacher in planning and leading an effective small group activity

- Identify strengths and challenges of small group teaching

Why Small Group Learning?

- Groups have the power to move people in creative ways. (Leadership, Voice)

- Groups emulate professional practice

- Small group learning is relational learning. (Not only with others but also with ourselves)

Understanding Group Work

- Small class size ≠ small group learning.
- Group work is a shift in educational philosophy.
- This shift is actually the addition of group dynamics into the learning environment.
- This work differs based on length / context of together time.

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- Many students have a history of being psychologically wounded from relationships so this work can be hard, but it can also healing.
  - Transference, Counter-Transference, etc.
  - Small Group Work is Not Therapy

Content & Process: Creating a Small Group Experience

- Content – The objectives & outcomes
- Group Process – What's happening in the group?
  - Group Development – Trust, Disclosure, Conflict, Resistance, Feedback, Silence
  - Stages
  - Professional Development

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Groups: Process and Practice,
Corey, Corey & Corey

A Task Model

- Focus on a skill or a task

- Looks at development or process improvement.

- Both leaders and students want to "Get down to business and get it done".

Marianne Corey, Gerald Corey and Cindy Corey, Groups: Process and Practice, 8th ed. (Belmont: Brooks/Cole, 2010)

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Task Model

- Task model alone can create problems
- As educators we need to connect the task to the process of learning. If we do not, then we run the risk of creating problems as the students miss the deeper opportunities to learn about how they learn, groups and how they relate to groups, vulnerability, asking for help. . . .

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Another Model

- Corey's Psycho-educational groups
- These groups focus on group and individual development by addressing the cognitive, affective, and behavior skills of the individuals in the group.

How do I become a more effective small group educator?

1) Start with your understanding of group work.

- Questions to ask yourself
  - Group of individuals or individuals in a group.
  - Is the goal delivery of content or group process?

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2) Self-Identify and understand your role and function in the group.

- Are you a member of the group?

- How do you create trust? Create challenge?

- Comfort in sharing vulnerabilities, engaging in raw emotions. . .

Metaphors

- Facilitator, mentor, coach, shepherd, leader, co-journeyer.

- Learning is not seen as a truth being conveyed from you to a student, but a discovery process of all participants engaged in learning.

Catherine Fosnot and Randall Perry, Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives and Practice, 2nd ed. Ed. Catherine Fosnot (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005)

- All participants!!

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- Techniques more than theories support your leadership. Develop techniques!
  - Word of caution – don't just try a technique without first experiencing it.

- Group Techniques - Interventions
  - Interventions lead towards movement.
  - Conflict, resistance, feedback, silence

- Framing is a technique to help students process.
- Role Play is a technique that I use often.
- Problem-solving Activities

Students

- You will need to help your students transition to small group mentality.

Biggest Lesson
(Learned the hard way)

- Over-working – If you are talking more than your group, maybe you are carrying the groups anxiety, fear, confusion or maybe you are not comfortable with silence, disagreement, etc.

- Example: Silence

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