

5 Tips for Working with Large Groups

Dialogue Education™ can work with any group size, but may look different depending on how big or small your group is. Here are a few things to keep in mind when working with large groups.

- 1. Match the WHERE with the WHO.** When you know you have a large group coming to an event it is critical to find a space to allow everyone to sit and move around comfortably, and enables you to easily work in groups. The learning environment has a direct impact on what types of tasks you can execute and how. If you have no control of the space, limit the number of people. If you have no control of either, find ways to have groups move to other nearby spaces for various tasks or portions of tasks.
- 2. Use more pair, trio and small group activities.** The best way to raise all voices, engage everyone at the same time, and make all learners feel included is by using pair, trio or small group work. Learning happens when new content is challenged, debate and used. Reducing the size of group by dividing it up is a great way to do this. It is also very energizing!
- 3. Sample.** When work, debate, and engagement with new content has happened in groups, there is no need to share everything again in the large group. The learning has already happened, the time in the large group can be used to hear a summary of the work, OR general observations about what happened, OR pressing questions. This can be done by quantifying the responses (e.g. “Let’s hear 1 idea from each small group.”) or hearing a few examples of what was discussed (e.g. “We’ll hear a few of your strategies.”). Long periods of time talking in the large group can de-energize, give select (often articulate and powerful) people time to talk, and exclude many voices.
- 4. Use individual or reflective work.** In addition to small group work, time to work independently can help learners to individualize the learning by analyzing how it fits within their context and planning how they will use what they are learning. It can be helpful to follow individual work up by hearing a sample from the group.
- 5. Ensure safety.** Many learners do not feel comfortable sharing within a large group setting, *unless* safety is well established. When facilitating dialogue or sampling within the large group, invite participation, but don’t require it – those who want to speak up will, give lots of affirmation to those who do contribute without taking anything away from those who don’t, have opportunities for learners to share in small groups or pairs before sharing in the large group and begin with open questions that invite dialogue about topics familiar to the learners.