

5 Tips for Working with Small 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 small groups.

- 1. Continue to use smaller groups or pairs.** Avoid the temptation to have all dialogue happen within the full group no matter how small. Learners may still feel reluctant to be the first to share with the whole group even when the group is small. If the group is quite small try splitting the group in two or using pairs for initial discussions and then hearing a sample as a whole group.
- 2. Be prepared.** Plan ahead if you know or suspect that the group may be small. Make sure that your “How” or your design will work with a small number of people. Adapt any tasks that rely on a larger number of learners.
- 3. Use Energizers.** Without the buzz of dialogue that comes with a large group it can be easy in a small group for the tone to become more subdued. Inject energy through music, change, movement and humour.
- 4. Ensure all voices have space.** In a small group, strong personalities may become more overpowering and impact the safety of the group. Refer to the “10 Types of Learners” (Appendix E in your course binder) for strategies to respond to various learner personalities. Be sure to continue to invite, not expect participation in group dialogue so that learners don’t feel pressured to speak up.
- 5. Make it Safe.** Small groups can tend to feel more intimate. This can be a great atmosphere for learning – *if* safety is adequately established. Be sure to create group guidelines together, use a warm-up, keep it relevant but light at the beginning, and not get too personal too soon.