

## **International Entrepreneurship Educator's Programme**

### **Entrepreneurial Learning - Pedagogical Note Series**

#### **5. Use of Small Group Work**

##### **1. Small Group work?**

Can be used as an interactive device with a participant class where the participant numbers, space, seating arrangements in the room and physical facilities for break out are such as to make it possible. Group work can be undertaken as a short interactive discussion of a point or question begged by the facilitator where there is small group 'round a table' seating. It can be used as a break out strategy to consider an issue, critical incident or short case as part of a session. Or it can be the formation of a group for preparation of work for a further session, for example a case or a demonstration. Groups can be as small as 2 and probably a maximum of 5/6 if opportunity is to be given for adequate participation by all parties.

Where group work is to be part of the dynamics of the learning process 'in class' then it usually demands that the class size is restricted to a 'capacity' for maximum of six groups. Larger numbers can be covered where there is team teaching and therefore greater scope for individual group mentoring and the exercise does not demand whole class feedback.

##### **2. How is a group exercise constructed?**

Group membership needs to be carefully selected. Criteria for selection will depend on the task and the composition of participants. Composition criteria might include: level and nature of experience; seniority mix; personality; age; sex; level of expertise in relation to the task. Group exercises are also a means of building know-who relationships as well as bonding and therefore mixing groups up at different times is often desirable.

For constant and highly interactive enterprise teaching then round table groupings are ideal. Groups can then be asked, for example, to quickly discuss an issue, for example 'Are entrepreneurs born not made', 'Are all small business owners entrepreneurs', 'How would you evaluate whether you could trust someone in a business deal?' - and so on. They are also ideal for encouraging a period of reflection on an issue, exchanging experience or counselling each other. As an example of the last-mentioned, in running a programme for new entrepreneurs and a after class discussion of 'what makes a good idea' groups sitting together can be asked to evaluate each other's idea against the criteria agreed.

Break out groupings are designed to tackle more substantive issues – either a mini case or asked to arrive at a set of conclusions concerning a major issue. An example of the latter is given in the programme where participant groups are each asked to critique a component part an NCGE Outcome and draw out implications for how best to deliver it.

Key issues often neglected in group work are: ensuring that the group is clear about the task and desired outcomes; facilitation and guiding a group without controlling it or just leaving it to 'get on with things'; and ensuring that there is adequate time for the task.

### **3. Relevance to Entrepreneurial Learning**

Group work is a major component of ensuring ownership of learning, learning by doing, by inventing things, making things up, communicating orally, building teams, building confidence in a situation of low exposure and solving problems creatively. It also often simulates getting things done under pressure and making decisions without too much information.

### **4. Outcomes**

It is important that outcomes are carefully considered and that space is given for evaluation and reflection of the work of the group. A common mistake – easily done under time pressure – is to fail to allow time for reflection and building on the group outcome. 'Report Backs' do not always achieve this and may bore the rest of the group. Asking the group to write up properly in good presentation format its findings is often a more rewarding outcome as the process forces coherence.