

APPENDIX A

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THE GROUP PROCESS FORMULA

Icebreaker

The term “icebreaker” refers to that brief part at the beginning of a session that focuses on helping participants form the personality of the group. Generally the icebreaker meshes some information about participants as individuals (their feelings, experiences, values about a certain topic) with the subject matter for the session. The icebreaker is directed by the leader who also participates in the exercise. It involves members of the group talking or doing something – perhaps in pairs, small groups or sometimes in total group. It is an experience that says we are X number of people here in this group focusing on this subject matter.

In the first sessions, the main purpose of the icebreaker is for participants and leaders to get acquainted quickly on a level more meaningful than they might otherwise experience if they were x number of people in the same place at the same time. The icebreaker is a way to efficiently and effectively establish trust in the group, to “give permission” for people to say anything they would like in the group setting. It typically gets adrenalin going and invites people to invest in the group process. The facilitator does not teach in the icebreaker, she simply sets up the exercise which last no more than 20 minutes.

Sometimes the icebreaker can function as a way for participants to get rid of “excess baggage” so that they are clear to focus on the subject matter of the group. Excess baggage can take the form of confusion about last week’s homework, or something that’s weighing on them from home or work, or concern about the amount of snow that’s falling outside – anything that might stand in the way of learning. In later sessions, the icebreaker might be homework review - giving participants a chance to express concerns, successes, and not so successes about the out-of-session assignments.

All participants and leaders participate in the icebreaker. This ensures that people will be more prone to participate later in the group. The idea is that “If I’ve spoken once and have been listened to and accepted, I’m more willing to try it again.”

Foreshadowing

The Formula is more or less sequential – each session starting with an Icebreaker and ending with the Transition. Foreshadowing can occur several times during a session; it is a statement of transition or a “grounding” for participants about why we’re doing what we’re doing. Foreshadowing is often a statement of goals or expectations. It provides parameters for people before they actually do an exercise or group activity. The leader will state what is to be done, why we are doing it, and how it will be used (oral report from everyone only, hearing from 3-4 people). Foreshadowing provides safety in the group because directions are clear and thorough.

Foreshadowing also answers “comfort” questions for participants such as, “Is this a lecture class?” “Can we ask questions whenever we want or save them until the end?” “Can we only get coffee on the break or any time during the session?” “Will we start and end on time?”

Foreshadowing, too, is used as a bridge – looking back to where we have been and forward to where we are going. The term is used to touch on what is to come next – not explaining it or teaching it – but giving an idea about what is going to happen. Foreshadowing can sometimes be a “dangling of the carrot” – raising interest about what is to come next.

Inductive

The leader plans, creates, and initiates the Inductive part for each session a group meets. The meat of the Inductive phase of a group comes from the participants. It is usually an exercise that is geared towards calling forth something that participants already know about the subject matter for the session. The specific information that leaders want to give will come in the Deductive part of the group.

The Inductive section of the group attempts to bring into awareness experiences of participants that dovetail with the subject matter for the session. It needs to be an exercise that will resonate to some degree with everyone in the room. Therefore, as a leader, you need to establish the inductive exercise by thinking of a “common denominator” experience for the group, that is, one that everyone can relate to.

With the Inductive exercise, you want to think of an exercise that will make the subject matter come alive for participants. For example, in a parenting class on “setting effective rules for children,” we asked participants to describe “musts” or “have to’s” in their families when they were children; or if the topic for a session was “evaluating my program” you might establish an Inductive like: “Describe a time someone unfairly judged you.” We can guess that everyone has an experience that will come to mind, whether they share that experience or not with the group.

Participants’ responses to the Inductive exercise most often are descriptive. They describe their experiences in response to the Inductive exercise. This gives the leader “fodder” to tie in to the teaching points she wants to make which directly relate to the subject matter for the session.

The Inductive part of the Group Process Formula is a way of tapping what individuals already know about the subject matter. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has information, experiences, and feelings on some level about virtually any topic – and that when those experiences join with the information that will be presented later, there can be increased motivation for learning and for utilization of material.

The question for the leader in creating the Inductive, is, “What common denominator experience can I tap into that touches in some way the subject matter and demonstrates that participants already have a wealth of ideas, experiences, and feelings about the topic for the day - whether the topic is “how to change a tire,” “how to write a progress report,” or “Speaking effectively in public.”

The Inductive part of each session is based on the belief that when some facet of the subject is highlighted for participants, they will buy into the subject matter more readily and will be more prone to use the information in their work or personal lives. The Inductive reflects the belief that an important component of learning is that it be experiential, that is, that it be lived. Rarely do people learn by pouring our pearls of wisdom into the empty vessels before us. The Inductive attempts to dovetail what is “in” the participant and “in” the leader as they look together at material. The individual participant’s already existing relationship to the subject matter is what the leader attempts to raise into awareness in the Inductive section of the Group Process Formula. The responses are individual for each member of the group and equally as varied.

Deductive

The Deductive section usually has two parts – the Deductive information and the Deductive exercise. The Deductive information is the leaders’ presenting information about the subject for the session. It is didactic information. It, too, is the tying together of what participants expressed in the Inductive part with what the leader is presenting about the topic.

The Deductive exercise is the culminating activity where participants “try on” that new information. It is an opportunity for participants to see how the new material fits and feels for them in the laboratory setting of the group before they try it out in their real world setting. This exercise is a chance for people to test the waters as they relate to the new material. The Deductive exercise begins the process of integration of the material that hopefully continues long after group ends. Here we are asking participants to be actively involved with the new information, to use that information and to change in some way. Participants are often shifting from one perspective to another in this part of the session. This can be as frightening as it is exciting. The changes can happen subtly or with explosions. After having “tried on” the new material, participants may resist using it or question its relevance to them. This resistance is a natural part of people’s changing.

As a facilitator of learning, we are asking participants to extend themselves beyond the familiarity of what they know and to utilize the strangeness of new material. Implicitly, we are asking them to entertain change because the expectation is utilization of material. We are asking people to assimilate this new perspective in such a way that it is alive for them and we expect that they will eventually make it their own.

Transition

The Transition part of the Group Process Formula focuses the attention of participants outward to use what they have learned in the group in their real world. It is the process that they have experienced in the Deductive exercise extended into their everyday situations. Transition, most often, takes the form of homework for participants. It is an invitation to experience one’s self in a new way in the every day world.

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STRUCTURING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

A Formula for Group Process

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THE ROLE OF THE GROUP LEADER AS A FACILITATOR OF LEARNING

Groups are much greater than the sum of their parts. Most often, they take on a life of their own. They have a life span – a beginning, middle and an end, which is simply the length of time the group will meet. During this life span, a group personality is formed.

The role of the group leader is to guide the formation of the group's personality, to foster the growth of the individuals who make up that personality, and to nourish the growth of the group as an entity. This group personality, formed by the individual members of the group, participants and facilitators alike, has a unique energy which needs to be affirmed, rekindled and recharged each session that the group meets. The direction the life of the group takes is different for each group.

As every person is unique in his or her own way, as well as similar to every other person, so is the case with groups. Groups develop in the way that individuals do. They, too, have a crawling, walking, running and sometimes "flying" stage. And like people, some groups come into the world frightened, deadpan, or fighting and kicking. By the third session of most groups, leaders probably have a good picture of the personality of the group.

As a group leader, the hope is that the group ends in late adolescence. By the time the group is in its adolescence, if all goes well, the leader will have as much control of the group as one would a big, brawny adolescent. The participants will challenge, question, change the direction of the group, relish in their independence. In the beginning, leaders need to "hold participants' hands" direct, and guide; by the last session, leaders are consultants to participants and participants function as consultants to one another.

Most learning involves a relationship. The feelings, experiences and perspective of the people in the group are as important as anything that is taught. The leaders' posture is one of having information to communicate, but not having all the right answers about how to apply that information for the participants in the group. Group leaders are facilitators of learning. Much of this facilitation is going to happen through the leaders own genuineness, and his or her comfort with the material. The attitude as a facilitator of learning is one of prizing the learner, valuing his or her opinions, and genuinely believing that all of the participants in the group are worthy of respect. This means crawling into their shoes and walking around, accepting their perspective (which does not necessarily mean agreeing with that vision) and knowing them to be people who can make the best decisions for their work and personal lives. The job is to facilitate their knowing that about themselves.

THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP PROCESS

The Group Process Formula is a structure for presenting material in a group setting that focuses on the dynamics of group process. This structure aims to make the material come alive for participants and leaders and aims to produce increased awareness and positive changes in participants that encourages practical applications in their work and possibly personal lives. The Formula delineates five stages for each session the group meets – icebreaker, foreshadowing, inductive, deductive, and transition. These stages foster the maturation of any on-going group no matter what the purpose for meeting.

The Formula evolved from many years of teaching and leading groups, wondering why some groups were dynamic and some were torture, and examining what influence the group leader might have in making groups successful. The Group Process Formula is the culmination of years of research, attempts at addressing a variety of learning styles, teaching methods and group process theories combined with the belief that experiential learning is the best teacher for us all and the conviction that learning involves the dovetailing of the learner's experiences with new information. The Formula is an ideational construct and conceptual framework for sequentially understanding the growth of a group's personality, and for recognizing learning as a growth (and therefore, change) process.

Facilitating means providing time and space for learning to happen within the individual participant. Ideally, facilitators enjoy their groups and they, like their participants, feel energized by the group. The responsibility of the leader stops with the dialectic of teaching; learning is an individual "happening". Facilitating participants integration of material is the primary task of facilitators. The Group Process Formula helps transform a group of people into a community of learners.

For groups structured in this way, there is a lot of interaction, energy, and reflection. Learning takes place intrapersonally and interpersonally for participants, and often for leaders. The Formula attempts to bring together the cognitive, affective and experiential domains of learning in the group. The subject matter for the group becomes the meshing of the learners' perceptions and experiences with the information presented. This process of integration maximizes the potential for the learner to use his or her new-found knowledge.

Creating a climate where participants learn the skills for themselves and use them long after group has ended, where participants have a healthy breaking-away from group. Where the atmosphere is one where autonomy is felt and appreciated is the goal for each group. Using the Group Process Formula maximizes that's happening.

In each session there is an attempt to keep a continuous unfolding for participants that hopefully will go on after group ends. It is the rhythm that we, as facilitators, want to foster –the coming to conclusions and forming questions; the opening up to new information, then closing to integrate it; pushing the complacency of the familiar, and inviting change to happen