



Colin Brierley¹ and Jane MacKenzie²

¹Media Production Unit, ²Academic Development Unit, Learning and Teaching Centre, 64 Southpark Avenue, Glasgow, G12 8LB
c.brierley@admin.gla.ac.uk and jane.mackenzie@admin.gla.ac.uk

We have produced a video resource that documents a sample range of small group teaching formats. Colleagues and students from the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and St Andrews agreed to be filmed during the process of a single small group session. The following different formats are captured in the resource: a Genetics problem solving tutorial, a discussion tutorial on Biology ethics, a problem-based learning session from a Medical curriculum, an interactive English Literature tutorial, a Veterinary clinical training session and an Astronomy small group project. Our aim in this project was to capture real examples of the content, processes and structures of these different examples of small group teaching to produce a resource that can be used for academic development workshops and self study.

Introduction

Small group teaching is a much used, badly defined and often overlooked academic task. Preparing for and managing small groups effectively is a challenge and therefore SGT is a key element of all of the Learning and Teaching Centre's educational development provision including the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme (NLTP).

Since SGT encompasses not just the classic tutorial or seminar but also problem-based sessions, laboratory and group project work, our aim in this project was to produce a video resource that reflects this richness and complexity of context and to use it to challenge participants in our academic development programmes to re-think what is meant by SGT. In addition having examples of effective SGT to consider and discuss will support our participants' own teaching in this area.

Methods

We recruited volunteers for filming in two ways. First, personal contacts of the authors were approached directly and second, SHED (the Scottish Higher Education Developers sub-committee of Universities Scotland) were approached and asked to identify good small group teachers within their home institutions. Recruitment was not without its challenges. Whilst many people believed that filming a lecture would be relatively straightforward, they were concerned that filming a tutorial or seminar might impact on the quality of the learning experience. However we did identify and recruit six volunteers who, we believe, represent a good spread of small group teaching formats.

We experienced some technical challenges in undertaking this project. From the outset we were clear that we wished to maintain the verisimilitude of these learning activities and therefore the presence and impact of the film crew had to be minimised. For this reason, the decision was made to use one DVCPRO Camcorder instead of two, a direct result of this was that real time interactions were not captured however we believe this has mainly been overcome through careful sound editing.

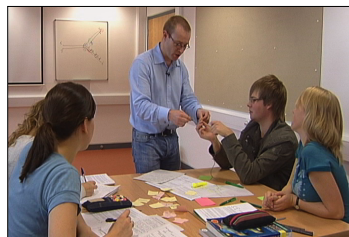
A second challenge related to the quality of sound recording. After careful consideration of the best way to cover so many people for the audio recording, we decided that a high quality directional 'gun' microphone system would be the preferable way of covering the students and far less intrusive, logistically

Methods contd.

challenging and time consuming than placing individual microphones on each student. The microphone was mounted on an extendable pole, which allowed the sound to be recorded with minimum interference to the groups. The teachers were fitted with radio microphones for the recordings so that they had complete freedom of movement and all interviews were recorded this way.

Figure 1

Students working with their lecturer in a Genetics problem-solving tutorial as part of their Medical curriculum (University of Aberdeen)



Thanks to Dr Andy Schofield and his students for the image.

The resource

We have been successful in filming 6 individual teachers and their students. The films represent the following teaching scenarios.

- Genetics problem solving tutorial within the Medical curriculum (University of Aberdeen) – see Figure 1
- English Literature tutorial (University of Glasgow) – see Figure 2
- Bioethics discussion class within the Biology curriculum (University of St Andrews)
- Problem-based learning small group session within the Medical curriculum (University of Glasgow) – see Figure 3
- Physics and Astronomy small group projects (University of Glasgow) – see Figure 4
- Clinical skills session within the Veterinary curriculum (University of Glasgow)

Figure 2

Students and their lecturer considering one of the themes of their reading in an English Literature tutorial (University of Glasgow)



Thanks to Dr Bryony Randall and her students for the image

Figure3

Students working with their facilitator to brainstorm a problem-based learning scenario in Medicine (University of Glasgow)



Thanks to Dr Joanne Burke and her students for the image.

The resource contd.

The films have been edited to demonstrate some of the key features of effective small group teaching, e.g. briefing small group tasks, threading discussions, designing suitable activities and formats (this includes room set-ups and decisions about group size). In addition each of the teachers have been interviewed about the aims of the session and the content, process and structure of the sessions being filmed. Edited highlights of the interviews are included in the resource to further illustrate teachers' intentions and interventions in small group teaching.

Volunteer groups of NLTP participants and GTAs will be asked to view the resource and take part in facilitated discussions around its effectiveness. Questions addressed will be the verisimilitude of the resource, its relevance to them in terms of their current and future teaching practices and how best the resource can be used. Further, informal feedback will be invited from future course participants in terms of changes they make to their SGLT practice. If you are interested in receiving a copy of this resource please contact the authors.

Figure 4

Students working on their Astronomy project while their lecturer explains the process of the projects (University of Glasgow).



Thanks to Dr Giles Hammond and his students for the image.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Learning and Teaching Development Fund for its financial support. We would also like to thank all of the brave teachers and their students who part in the filming: Joanne Burke, Giles Hammond, Patrick Pollock, Bryony Randall, Andy Schofield and Morven Shearer.