

SMALL GROUP EFFICACY
A Statement of Practice

James Lewicki
Lewicki Education Consulting

Effective Learning: Small Group Efficacy
Principles and Practice

Small Group Efficacy

The significance of a small, close group of students is the most powerful difference that innovative practice in education has created these last 20 years. Often called the advisory, this group of 15-25 students can make a world of difference – for themselves and for their community.

- What does it mean to understand that a community accepts you?
- What does it mean to accept others different than you?
- What does it mean to be inclusive and open to working through things?
- What does it mean to have engagement without needless entanglements?

When moving forward, keep in mind these five principles of Small Group Efficacy

1. Variation engenders new *information*; new information engenders *opportunities* for learning; opportunities engender *leadership* activation.
2. Small group efficacy shortens the time and encourages the pathway between information and change – an *action bias* results therein.
3. Information in complex systems derives from the interaction and variation of participants.
4. All members of a system have a positional value in that system. (Angyal)
5. “Hands-on Learning is Mental” (Dewey)
 - a. Always reflect to a depth of meaningfulness on significant work.
 - b. Explore the 5 levels of WHY. (why, why, why, why, why?)
 - c. Result: DEEPEN EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING.

Why are we doing this work?

It means everything!

As to the role of the student -- All too often, alienation and one-sided relationships of power and control create conditions of social fracturing. Successful schools can best reap academic success by paying attention to social capacity. Positive and productive social capability is a measure of the degree of respect and respectfulness that exist. It is this respectfulness that allows diverse people to converse, collaborate, and develop group efficacy experiences.

As to the role of the teacher -- In the second half of the 20th Century, K-12 education solidified into an atomized structure in which teaching responsibility rested with an individual educator alone with a group of children/youth; rather than with the collective talent and shared capacity of an ensemble of collaborating educators. This work is an opportunity to continue the shift from the former to the latter and to bring exponentially-talented efforts into play.

What are some best practices for developing small group efficacy?

Small group efficacy is about deep learning, significant change, and social justice. For this positive and productive maturity to anchor itself in a small group, 5 indicators need to be developed and activated within the group:

- Access
- Attention
- Knowledge
- Motivation
- Resources

A breakdown in any one of these five indicators will disrupt the ability of a team to move along the pathway from *information* to *understanding* to *change*.

More on each of the five...

1. Access
 - a. All in, all heard, all doing! (100%)
2. Attention
 - a. Evidence of attending to each other
 - i. Behavior – What are people doing?
 - ii. Ethos – Esprit de Corp
 - iii. Ethics – Micro actions that matter
3. Community agreements
 - a. ‘Rules of the Road’ ensure clear maintenance of standards of shared practice.
4. Knowledge
 - a. What do we know?
 - b. What do we want to know?
 - c. How do we learn from what we do together?
5. Motivation
 - a. Why does it matter?
 - b. Why do I care?
 - c. Why do we care?
6. Resources
 - a. People – Elders and experts and mentors
 - b. Things – Tools to move us along
 - c. Community – Places to DO

Why do students do well?

A productive small group generates a level of community accountability (I matter, they matter, it matters what we do together). Each student is visible and tangible to each other. When such a level of authenticity is achieved, individual skill sets mobilize and, in turn, collectively result in change.

Traditionally, external controls of rules and normative structures determined the student’s lay of the land. Small group efficacy shifts these external controls to ones of minimal concern, and the demonstrated group efficacy becomes the ‘norm that matters’. This NEW accountability is now defined by these internal norms that are actually aligned with the student’s interests, voice, power of implementation, and the learning itself. A place of *inclusive belonging* grows value just as a vibrant forest replenishes and nourishes our atmosphere.

What is the evident result?

As a teacher privileged to develop small groups over many years, I have heard countless remarks as to the manner in which the students treat one another and as to the respect they extend to others. Adults always comment on how these students interact genuinely and confidently with adults, and how they interact authentically and kindly with each other. Clearly, these are the qualities that really make a difference as students seek their place in the world about them.

The experience of developing a productive small group is, in many ways, unique and distinctive each time. The above principles and small group understanding matter, but the facilitation by the educators and the interactions therein with the students claim a uniqueness of their own -- akin to the first summit of an unclimbed peak. When accomplished, the view is wide and the air is rare indeed!

***The performance of adults determines just as much success
of small group efficacy as the performance of students.
The needs of the small group are always at the center of the work.***