

# REVIEWING WITH LARGE GROUPS

## ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Discussion-based reviewing works best with small groups. Small groups of 6-10 people are an ideal size for creating a supportive climate in which learners can receive individual attention.

If groups are too *small* discussions may lack range and variety. If groups are too *big* it is difficult for each individual to get involved.

### **So how can you conduct reviews effectively when the facilitator-learner ratio is 1:20 or 1:30 or higher?**

The best solution is to employ (or train) more staff! But what can you do if you don't have enough staff with the right skills for facilitating small group reviews?

Here are some other solutions ... many of which involve *active reviewing methods*. Most of these solutions are suitable for both youth and adult groups. These solutions can also fit a range of programme designs. For example:

- the large group may have all done the same activity together, or
- they may have done the same activity in separate small groups, or
- they may have done different activities in small groups.

You can mix and match the following strategies and methods for reviewing with large groups in any combination you like...

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## STRATEGIES AND METHODS

### **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING TASKS**

Just as you can give a group a clear briefing for an independent activity task, so you can give a group a clear briefing for an independent reviewing task. There is an art to designing independent reviews just as there is an art to designing independent activities.

### **WHEN TO ANNOUNCE THE REVIEWING TASK**

The reviewing task can be set up in advance so that the briefing for the task includes the briefing for the review. Alternatively, the reviewing task can be announced when the activity task is finished or when the time available for the activity task has come to an end.

### **HOW TO ANNOUNCE THE REVIEWING TASK**

You can give the briefing for the reviewing task:

- to all groups at the same time
- one group at a time
- via one or two representatives from each group during or after the activity task
- spoken or via a written brief or using a combination of the two

### **BRIEFING VIA REPRESENTATIVES**

Briefing via representatives is an excellent option if this system is also used for briefing groups for the tasks. It helps to give activity tasks and learning tasks equal status and importance. Briefing via representatives also creates a useful forum in which questions can be asked, problems can be anticipated and adjustments can be made.

### **USING OBSERVERS**

This is one of many useful strategies that can be set up in advance.

Observers are provided with pen and paper, instant cameras, tape recorders, video cameras, checklists, shooting scripts or just good memories.

Observations can be fed back during the activity, during activity breaks or at the end of the activity.

During long activities observers can be rotated, or observers may participate fully in the activity task but are briefed to look out for specific kinds of behaviour. For example, all may look out for 'positives' or each may look out for a different aspect of 'good teamwork'.

N.B. If feedback is to be given without a trained facilitator present, you will probably want observers to focus on positive behaviours. This may well be something you would choose to do anyway - if you yourself were managing the review! See 'reviewing success' at <http://reviewing.co.uk/success>

### **INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION (ALONE)**

Here are four basic options:

**SOLO or MAGIC SPOT:** with or without questions to ponder, with or without tasks to do

**DIARY WRITING:** open, structured or scrapbook style - private or for sharing or for portfolio building

**QUESTIONNAIRE ANSWERING:** to create a 'snapshot' of a state of mind, to follow a sequenced reflective process, to generate data for analysis - to generate a personal profile via a scored inventory or simply to compare answers with others.

**ART WORK:** for a personal record, for exploration or for sharing responses and insights with others

### **INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION (WITH OTHERS)**

Participants carry out any of the 'alone' activities listed above - but with one or more others.

The facilitator reviews with the whole group in ways that take each individual back through their experience of the activity.

Guided reflection or watching a video of the activity can be suitable ways of helping individuals to reflect and (privately) relive their experiences in large groups.

These silent and passive methods should normally be followed with a more sociable and participatory reviewing activity in twos or threes or in home groups.

### **USE A TEAM OF FACILITATORS**

Use a team of facilitators, each reviewing with a small group. The team of facilitators can be group members who have been prepared for this role.

### **STAGGER THE PROGRAMME**

Stagger the programme so that half of the group do independent activities while the other half of the group take part in facilitated reviewing. This doubles the amount of reviewing that a facilitator will manage during a programme. It also requires facilitators who are capable of facilitating events that they have not directly witnessed. This can be an ideal opportunity for asking a group to start a review by presenting an [action replay](#) (rehearsed or improvised) of what happened.

### **CO-REVIEWING IN PAIRS (OR THREES)**

Set up independent tasks that will take learners through a partial or complete reviewing process. Three examples:

**QUESTION TRAIL:** pairs follow a trail with a review question at marker posts along the trail.

**CHAT CARDS:** pairs are given a sequenced stack of chat cards. Each card is turned over once each person has answered the question or has chosen to pass.

**WALK AND TALK** is a combination of the above two methods. You will need a suitable outdoor space. 'Walk and Talk' is best done in pairs, but pairs can be changed from time to time. A structure for this involves having question cards spread out on a large sheet or table, one question per card. Each pair chooses a card and walks out to the edge of the area (e.g. a large field) with one person as the questioner. At the edge of the field, the roles are reversed. This process helps to ensure that the time is shared equally between each partner. Back at the centre the card is swapped for a new one. Partners can also be swapped. The supply of questions can be sequenced (e.g. "past -future", or "me - us - them", or

"I was - I am - I will", or "good - better - best"). This is easier if the cards are colour coded or numbered. Alternatively the cards can be self-made by participants with each card representing individual or shared learning goals.

## REVIEWING THROUGHOUT THE LARGE GROUP

Two examples:

**INVESTIGATORS AND WITNESSES:** Set up half the group as investigators and half as witnesses. Teams of 2 or 3 investigators each have a different question and visit witnesses to find the answers. To even things up, roles can be reversed at half time. The first teams of investigators can focus on the activity experience, the second team of investigators can focus on learning and the future.

**QUESTION PAPERS:** Large sheets of paper (each with a question) are scattered around the reviewing area. In the time allowed ask everyone to visit a certain number of 'question papers' and to record key points from their discussions. One or two people can be asked to specialise in each topic. These people remain at the flipchart for their topic and record key points. Feedback can be to a plenary session or by everyone touring a display of the question papers.

## SHARING EXPERIENCES OR LEARNING THROUGHOUT THE LARGE GROUP

Four examples:

**DISPLAY:** Display flipcharts, pictures, collages, sculptures, newspaper front pages or other artefacts or souvenirs from the reviewing session

**FEEDBACK via DRAMA:** 'action replay' (many variations possible) or a 'learning journey' on the theme of 'past, present and future'.

**FEEDBACK via POEMS or SONGS:** an entertaining and inspirational way of sharing experiences - following an independent creative reviewing task.

**PLENARY FEEDBACK:** Feedback from each subgroup in a plenary session. This can be a big yawn session unless feedback is tightly controlled or imaginatively presented. But flashy presentations alone do not solve the numbers problem - when there is a lot of experience and learning to share in a short space of time.

**4 x 4:** Feedback within new subgroups each having one representative from each of the reviewing subgroups e.g. if a large group of 50 people have each just reviewed in 5 groups of 10, learning can now be shared across all 5 groups in 10 groups of 5. So why is it called '4 x 4'? Because I first used this method in a group of 16 people. Scale it up as you like, but keep the sharing groups small to encourage sharing of a worthwhile quality - unless all you want is a sharing of headlines.

## TIME-KEEPING

If you expect reviewing tasks to be achieved within a certain time, or if you expect review time to be shared out fairly within a subgroup, be sure to appoint a timekeeper within each subgroup. To reconvene large groups be imaginative and original in the methods you use. That's all I can say. I'll just leave you with plenty of space to be original!

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## MORE BIG IDEAS

(and some little ideas for **reviewing with large groups**)

### IDENTITY CARDS

If you want reviewing to happen in different sized groups, it is very convenient if each individual has a multiple identity. For example, if the large group is 40 people, deal out a deck of playing cards minus the picture cards. If I have a **5 of diamonds**, for paired discussion (or buddy support) my partner can be 'same number, same colour' (the 5 of hearts). A partner in the same suit could be 'same suit, together you total 11' (the 6 of hearts). For groups of 4, find three people with the same number. For groups of 5, find odd numbers in the same suit. For groups of 10, find everyone in your suit.

You can also use an 'identity card' system for assigning different roles within groups (e.g. odd numbers are talkers, even numbers are listeners; or lowest numbers are pessimists and highest numbers are optimists). The possibilities are endless. You can give instructions with announcements that all can hear, or with visual messages that all can see, or via briefing sheets distributed to everyone. Or you can use

the identity card system itself for giving instructions. This system is infinitely scaleable.

If you have more than 52 people (the number of cards in a deck), you can use two decks with different backs (for up to 104 people) or (much better) you will need to be creative and produce your own set of identity cards.

### **BRIEF ENCOUNTERS**

Everyone starts with a question on a card. People meet randomly in pairs, ask and answer each other's questions, swap cards, find a new partner etc. See this [more detailed brief with sample questions](#) Ideal as an ice-breaker, but with suitable questions it can produce focused (but randomly sequenced) reviewing.

### **SECRET ENVELOPE**

This can be stuck on the underside of seats or marked "Do not open until...". You can use this briefing method to encourage reviews that follow a particular sequence. For example one person may have an envelope that reads: "Do not open until everyone in your group is satisfied that part 1 of the reviewing task is complete". Another may have instructions for part 3. To get everyone finishing at the same time, another envelope might read: "Open this envelope exactly 20 minutes after the review started".

### **DEBRIEFING GAMES**

Thiagi has developed many debriefing games using cards and questions. A common feature of many of these games is that people are expected to rate the quality of other people's responses. This helps to bring out the best ideas and give credit where it is due. Most of Thiagi's debriefing games scale well, provided that the competitive aspects do not over-ride the co-operative spirit of debriefing. More details are at <http://www.thiagi.com>

### **MISSING FACILITATOR**

Each group receives a briefing that reads something like this:

*"The bad news is that you do not have a facilitator to help you to function well as a learning group. The good news is that by following these instructions you can create just the right facilitator for your group. Describe the values, skills and characteristics of the kind of facilitator who would enable you all (individually and collectively) to get most value from this event. Discuss examples of how they would respond to situations that might arise. Write an advertisement that describes the kind of facilitator who would be most likely to get the job."*

There are now three possibilities (at least):

1. "More bad news: it will take some time to find the facilitator you are looking for. The good news: now that you have taken part in this exercise you have all learned about the kind of facilitative actions that this group will support. That will make it easier for each of you to act in ways that are facilitative for each other."
2. "Give your advertisement to another group. They will choose two people to work with your group as co-facilitators for a trial period. At the end of the trial period you will ask them to leave while you prepare suitably balanced feedback for them. You then consider whether to revise your advertisement in any way, and send this to another group. Throughout this process your own group will be providing co-facilitators for other groups."
3. "More bad news: the kind of facilitator described in your advertisement cannot be found. The good news: with commitment and support you will be able to make up for what is missing by taking it in turns to fulfil this role (as facilitators or co-facilitators). You may need to revise your advertisement a little to make this an achievable challenge."

This is a special application of 'Missing Person' described in the [Active Reviewing Cycle tutorial](#)

### **EVEN MORE METHODS**

See [Reviewing by Numbers](#). Also many of the methods described in the **Active Reviewing Guide** at <http://reviewing.co.uk> can be readily adapted for use in large groups. The strategies described above will help you to make suitable adaptations. Or get in touch if you want more ideas or advice: [roger@reviewing.co.uk](mailto:roger@reviewing.co.uk)

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