

The community developed in the classroom is crucial. Students learn best in an atmosphere where they feel safe personally and competent academically. Social workers can help create this environment when working with groups of students or teaching a classroom lesson. When this atmosphere has been created prior to a community or individual crisis, students will take advantage of the safe environment to process the event.

Small groups go through stages of development, just as individuals do. Those stages are:

Forming – the group is put together and students begin to explore the “rules and norms” of their group

Storming – students begin to test the limits, each other and work through conflicts

Norming – the group settles into their pattern of production, with each member understanding their strengths in the group, and understanding how to access the strengths of others to accomplish the goals of the group

Performing – finally the group is ready to cooperatively produce results in a mutually supportive manner. This could be for academic success or processing a crisis.

Setting up the group takes finesse, so that groups understand that they are to measure success within their group, and not by competing with other groups. For children, smaller groups create safe places to learn academics as well as to learn social skills and give and get support when life’s circumstances create stress or grief.

In smaller groups, shy children can find a voice. Reluctant leaders are free to emerge. Small groups allow for practice in goal setting and problem solving. Collaboration, cooperation and mutual support are learned as the group dynamics are established. Struggling students naturally get peer modeling and tutoring. Brighter students solidify their learning as they support their peers.

What is my experience with working in small groups?

What are the strengths I bring to a small learning group?

What strengths would I be looking for others to offer me?

Where can I use groups to facilitate my work with young people?

The Classroom Community

