

Exploring the use of small group work as an effective teaching strategy to improve concept understanding

Elizabeth Roelofse

Abstract

This article explores the use of small group work as a teaching strategy through investigating the conditions under which small groups can be conducted effectively and in what way can support concept understanding. This research was prompted due to public relations students struggling to understand and interpret new concepts in class when instructed to complete tasks autonomously. This article? support a critical realist approach to learning which encourages students to construct knowledge socially and lastly, recommendations are made on how small group work can be improved as a teaching strategy in the classroom to accommodate millennial students.

1 Introduction

An old Chinese proverb states, "Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand", which postulates the need for students to engage in classroom activities to further their understanding. Small group work as a teaching strategy has been adopted as a "good" pedagogy to promote learning as an interactive and social process to develop new knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This articles explores the use of small group work in promoting concept understanding in a higher education classroom. This article investigates ways in which educators can use small group to improve conceptual clarity of learning of new concepts as well as provide recommendations for the strategic fit of small group work.

The identified problem that led to the research study was based on student deficits that exist due to students that are inadequately prepared for the current demands of higher education (Smith, 2012:2). The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA, 2010) explains that one of the deficits found in higher education is that students show an overall lack of achieving set programme goals as a result of students' struggle with proficiencies such as conceptualisation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training, 2013). From the above it is evident that one of the problems students are struggling with is concept understanding in the classroom.

To overcome this challenge, fair chances to promote critical and creative thinking in the classroom should be provided to all students (Gravette & Geyser, 2004:6; White Paper on Higher Education, 1997). This has led to the incorporation of teaching strategies in the classroom that are active and includes inputs and comments from students. Killen (2015:354) identifies small group work as a teaching strategy that focus on student engagement through the students' ability to openly communicate with a small group and build on one another's existing knowledge frame.

Frey, Fisher & Everlove (2009:13) explain that knowledge is built through the exchange of ideas and that students should be motivated to inquire and challenge one another's understanding. Frey et al (2009:17) further asserts that Russian educational psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), endorsed the belief that all learning is a result of sociocultural situations and that students can better clarify and broaden their understanding when discussing content and building on the ideas of peers within a group.

This study sets forth to determine the effect of small group work to create opportunities for student engagement in the learning environment to gain conceptual clarity and understanding.

2 Explanation of the problem statement including the research questions and objectives

Educational institutions in South Africa are experiencing many challenges in improving participation within the classroom environment which has largely been attributed to student's lack of responsibility in their own learning and the inability to transform thinking into concepts with limited subject-specific and learning skills (Naidoo & Paideya, 2015).

A recent task measuring 24 first year public relations students' conceptual understanding of public relations concepts through a matching exercise resulted in the outcome of three out of 24 students scoring 50%, one student scoring 40%, three students scoring 30%, eight students scoring 25%, five students scoring 20% and one student scoring 15% when completing the matching exercise individually (Roelofse, 2015). Based on the above, it is evident that concept understanding has not taken place in the first year public relations classroom when students are tasked to complete activities individually.

McElwee (2013) states that today's first year students reflect characteristics of the millennial generation. Millennial students are group orientated rather than being individualists who want to be seen as part of a group (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Millennial students are social in nature and highly collaborative who enjoy learning about new subjects and sharing what they have learnt with others (IEAB, s.a.)

Based on the above, the decision was made to utilise a more collaborative and engaging teaching tool to address the above problem. Small group work was identified as the teaching strategy to be used.

Linked to the problem being identified, the objective of this research is to explore the use of small group work as a teaching strategy to improve concept understanding. In order to achieve the above research objective, the research needs to seek answers to the following key questions:

- a) In what way can small group work be applied to ensure that it is used as an effective teaching strategy?
- b) In what way does the use of small group work assist students in exploring new concepts to improve understanding?

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3 Literature Study

Blatchford (2003:36) points out that small group work can support peer learning, fulfil individual needs and incorporate higher-order learning skills. It is therefore the aim of small group work to enhance critical thinking, oral skills and to improve one's understanding of oneself and of others through a social process by which members learn based on their social interactions (Brown & Atkins, 1988:5; Vygotsky, 1978).

Exley & Dennick (2004:2) suggests that small groups consist of five to eight members with six group members considered as the optimum number for effective small group work interactions to take place. This teaching strategy enables students as part of a group to negotiate meaning through democratic participation and elaborate on existing knowledge on specific topics (Dewey, 1916).

Social sciences students are often motivated students whom prefer to engage with prescribed content and discipline and to come to class ready to engage (Sweet & Michealson, 2010:3). A study done at Kansas State University examined public relations students developing case studies through the support of small group work inside and outside the classroom at the beginning of their public relations course. This study proved that small group work brings relevance to the understanding of module material, implementation of resourcefulness and interpersonal skills and a sense of accomplishment (Oukrop & Shaver, 1978).

Other studies have found that small group work played an incremental part in students overcoming misconceptions to enhance concept learning and can improve students' understanding of the subject matter as a whole and their thinking related to the subject matter (Shaughnessy, 1977; Bennett, Lubben, Hogart & Campbell, 2004:10).

Based on the above studies, one can conclude that small group work can be advantageous for conceptual understanding. Other benefits small group work impose is the shift from learners being passive recipients towards active members seeking understanding together (Garfield, 1993). This purports a deeper understanding of a subject not only to support the learning of the individual student but also to help his/her group members to learn through small group discussions (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

When students actively communicate with one another and listen to other student's ideas and discuss different perspectives, they are allowed to share their own individual thoughts on concepts which allows the whole group to explore the topic together and engage in sense-making which strengthens their understanding (Dangarema, 2007; NTCM Principles & Standards, 2009).

However, small group work may impose threats that can affect the performance of students in small groups. These threats can include students that are not accepted in small groups whom may be alienated and embarrassed avoiding them from learning effectively (Mills & Alexander, 2013:17). Some students may not feel confident to share their opinions and personal emotions and may not really understand the concepts or problems that the group members are discussing which could be the result on imbalanced power dynamics in the small group dominated by stronger students. Furthermore, some students may be "slow learners" and the group may proceed with deeper discussions without confirming every group members'

understanding of the concepts and lastly, if small group work is not monitored effectively, some students may waste time through unproductive group behaviour (Killen, 2015:206).

It is therefore the duty of the educator to ensure that students remain engaged with the subject matter and that students engage with each other in both an emotional and intellectual manner for students not only to explore new topics, but also get to shape each other's minds and lives (Sweet & Michealson, 2012:51).

In order for the educator to manage group work effectively, the educator should carefully plan lessons to incorporate small group work. Educators can inform students what is expected of them, clearly introduce the topic that students will be exploring and the expectations of learners in the small group such as being an active member, listening and contributing opinions through talking about and discussing things relevant to the task at hand (Killen, 2015:207:211).

For the purpose of this study, small group work within a public relations classroom will be explored to determine if students learn and understand concepts better when discussing them within a small group context.

Linked to the above literature review, key concepts related to the research can be defined as follows:

Small group work relates to two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships to work together to structure the learning environment (Forsyth, 2005; Killen, 2015:3)

Concept understanding refers to the ability to transfer knowledge of a subject into new situations and applying it to new contexts (Fasnot, 2015).

4 Research methodology

The following section will define the worldview selected for this study, the research design and research method and how data will be collected and analysed to investigate the research problem.

4.1 Worldview: Critical Realism

Critical realism is accepted as the research paradigm that supports the notion that knowledge exist as a direct result of social construction (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:31). This worldview supports knowledge construction based on subjects' prior knowledge and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:110). Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett (2010) posits critical realism maintains a strong emphasis on ontology which purports a deeper and underlying cause of events far beyond what is observable and which requires interpretive understanding. Based on the above, one can conclude that when students participate in small group work they can build on one another's prior knowledge and develop a new understanding of the work discussed. Within this paradigm the research explored if there has been an improvement in concept understanding through students building on one another's

knowledge frame when discussing new concepts in small group environment which requires further interpretation of findings and recommendations as to how different results can be yielded.

4.2 Research methodology: Exploratory Research and Quantitative Method

Du Plooy et al (2014:75) defines an exploratory research design as the study of an unknown area which main purpose is to develop and understand a subject matter and proposed to answer the questions of the researcher with evidence. The research methodology presented in this article adheres to the quantitative research approach which aims to develop and understand a subject matter and proposed to answer the questions of the researcher with evidence (Harwell, 2010:149). Information was collected in a structured format to produce empirical evidence and opinions were converted into statistical format. This quantitative method determined the application of small group work to improve concept understanding through the use of a questionnaire design.

4.3 Data collection: Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed taking small group work as a teaching strategy into consideration. A combination of open, closed questions and scale questions provides respondents with choices that can help the researcher to gain more specific answers (Driscoll, 2011:167). The questionnaire consists of 14 questions comprising of open, closed and scale questions that extracted data to explore if small group work is effective to improve concept understanding. The questionnaire included a cover letter and consent form that informed students of the purpose of and participation in the study. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to obtain data on their view of the use of small group work to promote concept understanding.

4.4 Data analysis

WisegEEK (2012) defines data analysis as the practice in which raw, primary data is organised for the extraction of useful information. Open-ended questions were analysed using coding through categorising data that respondents shared of their personal experiences (SAGE Publications, s.a.). Coding was used to identify patterns of similar responses.

Closed and scale questions were processed using Microsoft Excel to portray how many people responded in a certain way (Driscoll, 2011:196). Data is displayed in graphic forms such as pie charts, through the use of Excel (Fraenkel, Norman & Helen, 1993).

4.5 Population and sampling method to be applied

Wiid & Diggines (2013) defines the population as the group of people the researcher seeks to gain information from (Du Plooy, 2014:152). This group of people will help the researcher to determine whether the research questions based on the research problem can be answered. The population for this research include all public relations students studying towards a

Diploma in Public Relations at the branch of a specific private Higher Education Institution. This study specifically focussed on first year Public Relations students enrolled for the Public Relations module.

Sampling refers to the list of people the researcher aims to contact that will answer the developed questionnaire and the chosen sampling method for this study is convenient sampling which constitutes the unsystematic manner in which individuals of the sample will be selected to participate in the study (Du Plooy et al, 2014:134; Battaglia: 2008:525). Convenience sampling allows the researcher to approach students to participate in the research study at the institution of employment. A sample of 24 respondents was approached to take part as this constitutes the average class size of a first year public relations group. The sample size of ten students completed the survey to determine the effectiveness of small group work to improve concept understanding.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Trochim (2006) and Strydom et al (2007:58) identified four ethical principles that researchers in social sciences should adhere to: voluntary participation, informed consent, avoidance of harm and confidentiality.

For the purpose of the research study, the sample population of the research was approached and invited to participate in the study at a given place and time. The sample was assured that there is no obligation to participate and that the respondents that participated would in no way be favoured over non-participants and that all respondents would be protected from any form of physical and psychological harm. The purpose of the research was explained and complete information of the study was provided to respondents before they took part in the research investigation. Respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality through not being asked to present their full names and the privacy of participants were protected by ensuring that his/her information were shared or broadcasted to anyone but the researcher and the statistical analyst.

4.7 Validity and reliability

Branson (2014) defines validity as helping a researcher to make meaning out of test scores that will help the researcher to identify if a study can be applied to an entire population and reliability is defined as an instrument that identifies the degree to which the researcher's findings will remain consistent.

For the purpose of this study, internal validity was tested by requesting another researcher to work through the survey tool to point out any errors, vagueness or mistakes and external validity can be proved if the results of the research study shows high consistency throughout the responses of each participant. Reliability was tested by determining if the questions of the survey tool focused on exploring concept understanding and that it focusses on identifying if the participants taking part in the research study can confirm if small group work is an effective teaching strategy and whether concept understanding has improved.

4.8 Limitations of the study

Limitations can be defined as any potential problems the researcher can foresee when conducting the study which can threaten the validity of the study (Du Plooy, 2014:291). Lack of resources and time constraints were the two limitations that posed problematic for this study. Financial constraints which included the cost of paper and printing of questionnaires and time constraints due to busy timetables of both the sample group and the researcher limited interaction time with the group of respondents. Due to the nature of exploratory research, the results could not be generalised.

5 Data Analysis and Findings

The aim of data analysis was to interpret the answers of respondents. These findings were illustrated through tables and pie charts with scales which described findings. The findings were presented and grouped together as presented in the questionnaire that respondents completed. Fourteen questions in total were asked.

5.1 Identification of small group work – Question 1

The purpose of this question was to determine if students can identify small group work as part of the educator's teaching style. Figure 1 below provided findings pertaining to this question.

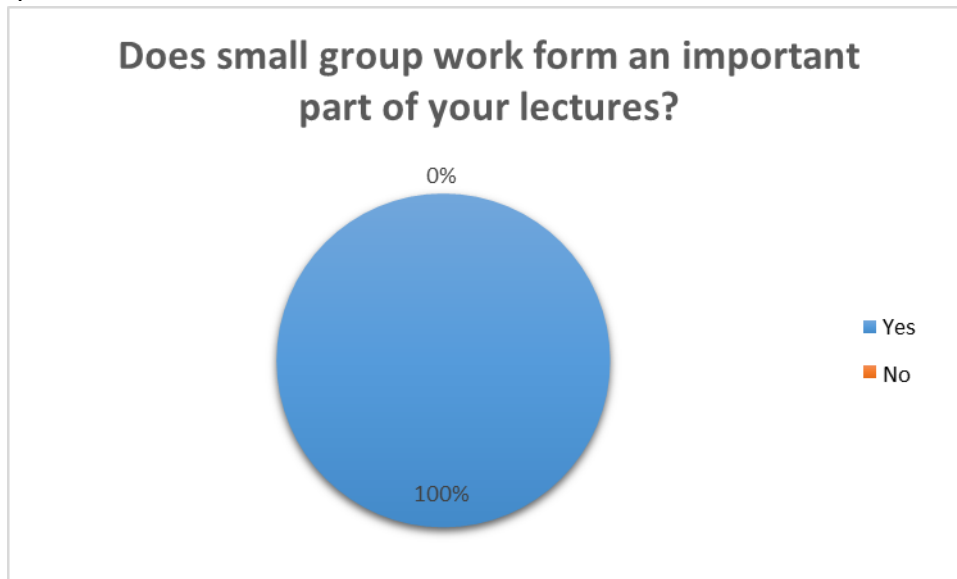


Figure 1 Identification of small group work

Related to the above graph it is evident that all respondents agreed that small group work does form an important part of their lectures. The implication of this finding is that even if respondents were aware of the use of small group work as a teaching strategy, it does not guarantee the effectiveness of the use of this teaching strategy.

5.2 Characteristics that define small group work – Question 2

Question two posed five statements to students and asked them to, based on a Likert scale, identify key characteristics of what they perceive as important to ensure effective small group work. A summary of the key characteristics that respondents were asked to assess includes:

- Consists of five to six students
- Work together to discuss topics and share meaning
- Respect each other and listen to each other
- Avoid distractions and staying focussed on the task
- Responsible for their own and one another's learning

The following table provides a summary of the key findings per category of the Likert Scale:

Table 1: Summary of Views on Characteristics of Small Groups

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Consists of five to six students	10%	10%	10%	70%	-
Work together to discuss topics and share meaning	-	-	10%	60%	30%
Respect each other and listen to each other	-	-	-	20%	80%
Avoid distractions and staying focussed on the task	-	10%	20%	20%	50%
Responsible for their own and one another's learning	-	20%	-	40%	40%

In terms of the first statement, as can be seen from the table above, 70% of respondents agree that a small group should consist of five to six students. Skinner, Merham & Benecke (2013:29) indicate that from a public relations perspective, small groups range from three to fifteen people, which aims to clarify students' level of disagreement with the statement. However, Sweet & Michealson (2012:51) argues that optimum learning can be achieved in small groups consisting of five to six students. Based on the above, majority of respondents agree that five to six students is the optimum number for effective functioning of small group work which supports optimum learning.

Related to the statement on working together to discuss topics and share meaning, 60% of respondents agreed and 30% of respondents strongly agreed that working together to discuss topics and share meaning constitutes effective small group work. This is in line with the views of Surgenor (2012:1) that productive small group work is active through the involvement of all group members sharing and discussing ideas.

Related to the third statement of respecting and listening to each other, 80% of respondents agreed and 20% strongly agreed that small group members respecting each other and listening to each other could result in effective small group work during small group

discussions. Killen (2015:211) supports the view that expectations of group members during small group work is to listen to one another and to contribute to discussions through taking turns to speak.

The fourth statement related to avoiding distractions and staying focussed on the task was included to determine if students perceive avoiding distractions and staying focussed on the task constitutes effective small group work. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed that effective small group work facilitates group members avoiding distractions and staying focussed on tasks. A combined 30% were undecided and disagreed to the statement made. Karweit & Slavin (1981) reports that during classroom discussions, students may spend between 10% and 50% of their time on off-task activities, which may lead to distractions. According to the above findings, the majority of respondents perceive avoiding distractions constitutes effective small group work.

The final statement in this question asked students to indicate whether they are responsible for their own learning and the learning of others. This statement was asked to determine if respondents feel that they have to take ownership of their own learning as well as shaping the learning experience of others. Forty percent (40%) of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed that students forming a part of a small group are responsible for their own and other student's learning. Based on the above finding, effective small group work can take place if students claim responsibility for their own learning as well as other students' learning. Small group work learning supports the shift in responsibility of teaching and learning from the teacher towards the group of students sharing ownership in their learning experiences (Teachervision, 2016).

Based on the above findings, the majority of respondents agreed that the above five statements should be adhered to in order to achieve effective small group work.

5.3 Satisfaction of small group use – Question 3

The purpose of this question was to determine if students viewed the current use of small group work as satisfactory. This allowed the researcher to reflect on the current use of small group work as a teaching strategy. Figure 2 illustrates the level of satisfaction respondents portray on small group work in class.

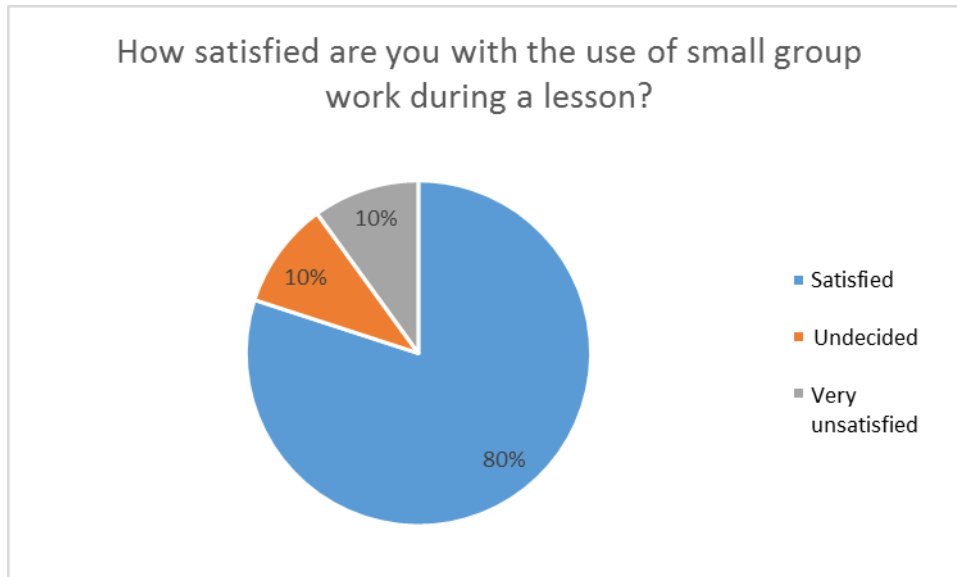


Figure 2 Satisfaction of small group work use

Based on the above it is evident that 80% of respondents were satisfied with the current small group work teaching strategy. The previous question in which respondents have identified the characteristics of effective small group work can assist the researcher in gaining an understanding of which factors should be focused on to obtain greater satisfaction in small group work.

5.4 Monitoring small group interactions – Question 4

The purpose of this question was to determine how students view the role of the educator during small group work. Figure 3 provides statistics on how respondents view the role of the educator as a facilitator during small group discussions.

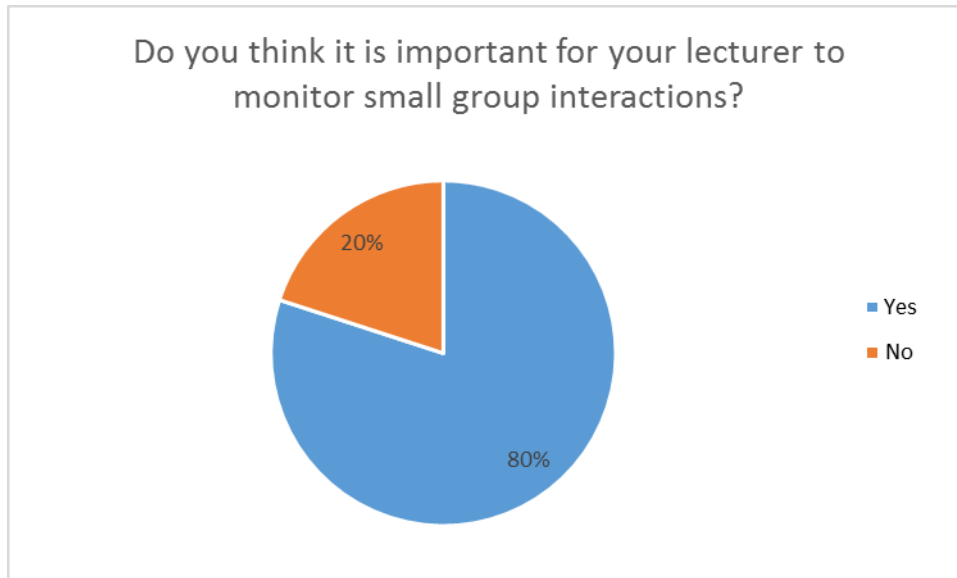


Figure 3 Monitoring small group interactions

Approximately represent 80% of respondents agreed that small group work interactions should be monitored by the educator. This indicates to the researcher that the majority of students prefer the educator to circulate among small groups. This behaviour is supported by The Centre for Teaching Excellence (2016) stating that the educator should monitor small group discussions to clarify any misunderstandings and answer questions to ensure that students remain on topic.

5.5 Discussing concepts in the classroom – Question 5 & 6

Question 5 asked of respondents to indicate whether discussions with peers are viewed as more important in concept understanding than direct instructions of the educator. As follow-up question, question 6 asked of respondents to explain their answer. This would indicate to the researcher which method students prefer to gain knowledge from and deepen their understanding of concepts in the classroom. Figure 4 illustrates statistics on the respondents' preference of teaching style. Views of respondents to explain their preference are provided after the graph.

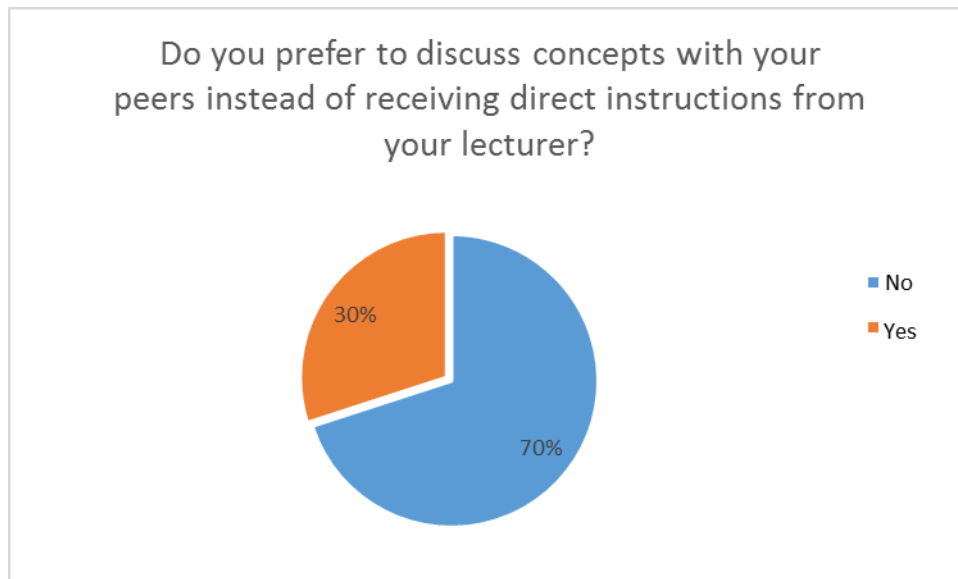


Figure 4 Discussing concepts with peers or the educator

Linked to the above graph it is evident that 70% of respondents indicated that they would discuss concepts with the educator compared to 30% of respondents indicating they preferred discussing concepts with peers. Reasons for this interesting view include that respondents feel the educator, more than other students, will be able to give insight into concepts that they may not understand (40%). Respondents also indicated that they rely on the educator as a source of knowledge (30%). This is in line with research by Wynne (2005:5) explains that often students enter the classroom with little experiences to reflect on. Therefore, students come to class to gain information and learn from the experiences of the educator to better their understanding. Respondents indicating that they prefer conversing with peers rather than the educator cited comfort in discussions and sharing thoughts and ideas with peers (30%).

5.6 Contributions to small group discussions – Question 7

The purpose of this question is to determine the level of readiness students portray to participate in small group. Figure 5 illustrates the frequency at which students contribute during small group discussions.

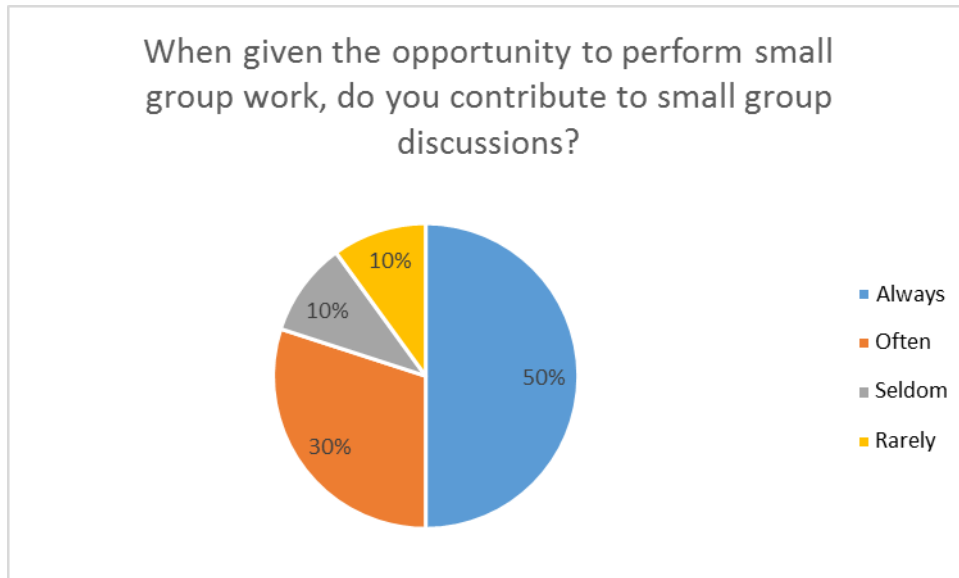


Figure 5 Contributions to small group discussions

Fifty percent (50%) of respondents indicated that they always contribute to small group discussions whereas a combined 50% often, seldom or rarely contribute. The implication of this finding is that not all students might take part in the sharing of ideas and rely on other students to shape their understanding. Taylor (2011) explains that different personalities in small groups may result in either steering away from their responsibilities or ending up dominating the group discussion not allowing all group members to participate.

5.7 Contributions during small group discussions – Question 8

The purpose of this question is to determine whether students perceive their contribution in a small group as a value-add to the learning experiences of other students. Figure 6 provides a summary of the findings.

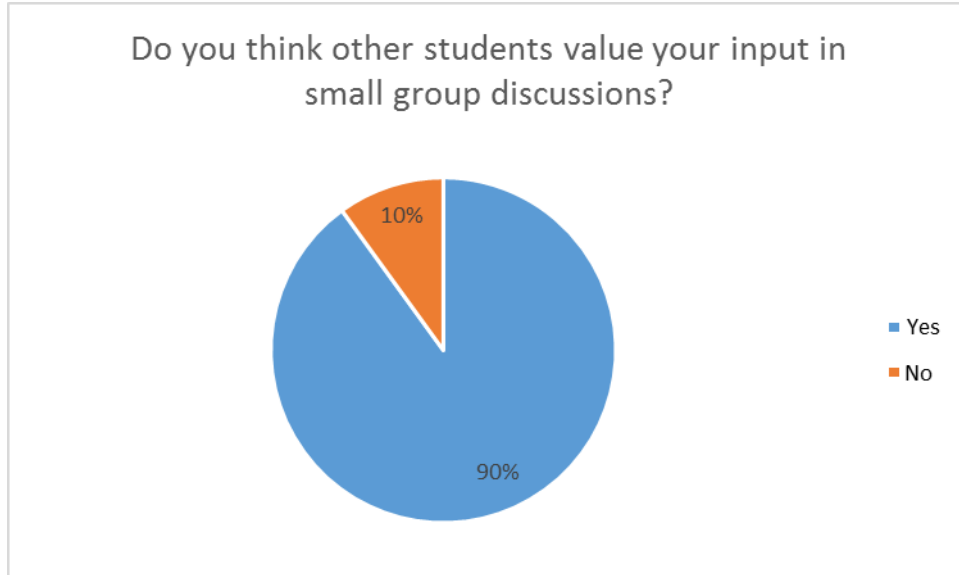


Figure 6 Contributions during small group discussions

Ninety percent (90%) of respondents perceived their contributions to be valuable to other students in their small groups. Center & Sarkisian (2010) explain that students that have a chance to express themselves and are listened to tend to work towards the group's goals which heightens small group efficacy.

5.8 Excitement to learn new concepts – Question 9 & 10

Question 9 asked respondents to identify the level of motivation at which they may enter small group discussions. As follow-up question, Question 10 was used to give respondents an opportunity to explain their views. Figure 7 illustrates the degree of excitement students exude when learning new concepts through small group work discussions. Views of respondents to explain their answer are provided after the graph.

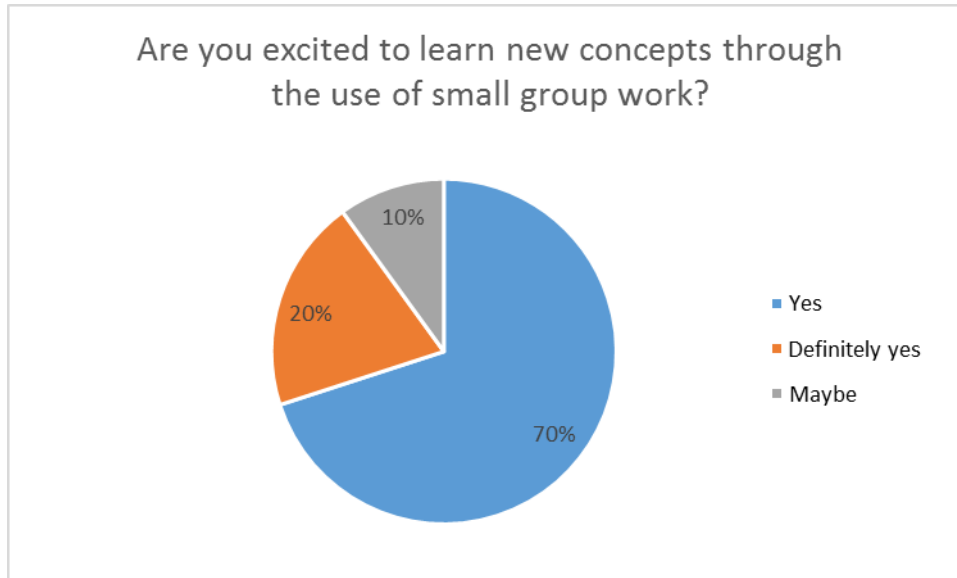


Figure 7 Excitement to learn new concepts

Ninety percent (90%) of respondents indicate that they are excited to learn new concepts when presented with an opportunity to discuss concepts with their peers. Reasons for this view include that respondents are excited to learn new concepts in small groups as this acknowledges different perspectives (20%) and that small group work can simplify content (40%) and stimulate deeper thought when discussing new concepts (30%) along with improved concept recall (10%). This supports the view of Stanford Teaching Commons (s.a.) stating that small group discussions aid in student understanding and broadens the awareness of other students' presence and perspectives in class.

5.9 Interest in concepts discussions – Question 11

The purpose of this question was to determine the level of interest students portray in one another's opinions when discussing new concepts in small groups. Figure 8 illustrates the findings below.

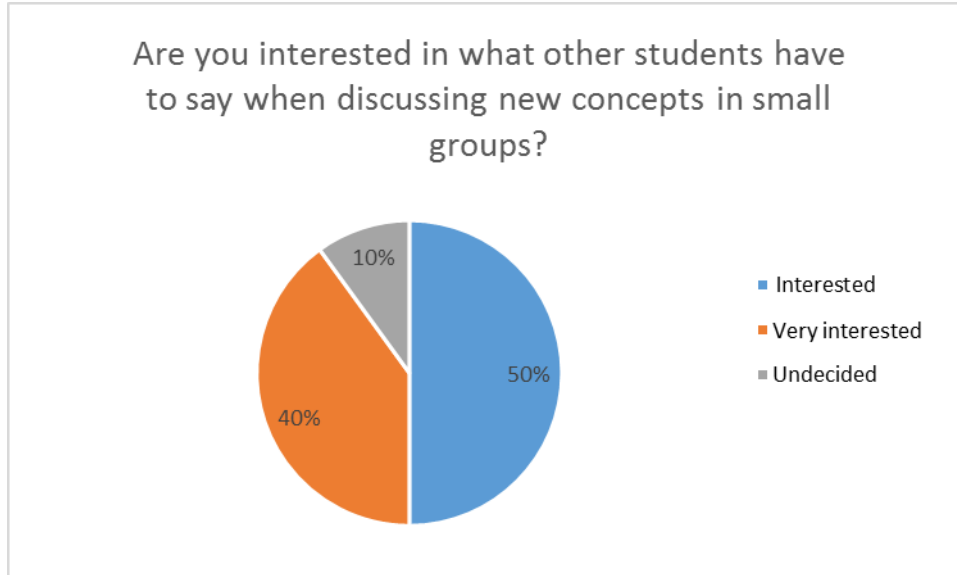


Figure 8 Level of interest in discussing new concepts in small groups

As can be seen from the above graph, 50% of respondents are interested and 40% are very interested in what other students have to say during small group discussions. Candler (s.a.) asserts that especially when students have difficulty understanding concepts, small group discussions can guide students to make connections that are meaningful and interesting.

5.10 Understanding of new concepts – Question 12 & 13

The purpose of this question was to determine if respondents find explanations of others of new concepts are helpful to their own understanding of the public relations concepts. This would identify to the researcher if small group work does add value to the learning experiences when exploring new concepts. The findings are illustrated in Figure 9 and views of respondents to explain their answers are provided after the graph.

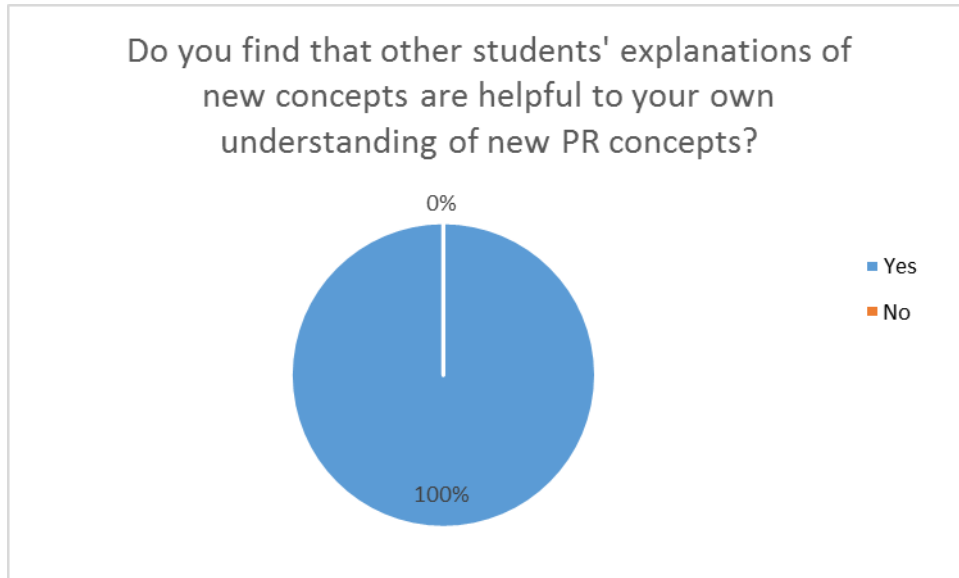


Figure 9 Understanding of new concepts

Based on the above graph, all respondents find the explanations of other students on new public relations concepts helpful. This indicates that shared explanations can add value to students' own understanding of public relations concepts. Reasons for this include respondents stating that other explanations enhance understanding (70%) and provides new insights (20%) which also encourages critical thinking (10%). Stanford Teaching Commons (s.a.) support the above by stating that when students discuss concepts, it provides them with an opportunity to both assess and deepen their understanding of concepts.

5.11 Meaning of concepts during small group discussions – Question 14

The purpose of this question was to identify the level of conceptual clarity students experience during small group discussions. This finding will indicate to the researcher if small group discussions on new concepts are meaningful to students. Figure 10 illustrates the findings below.

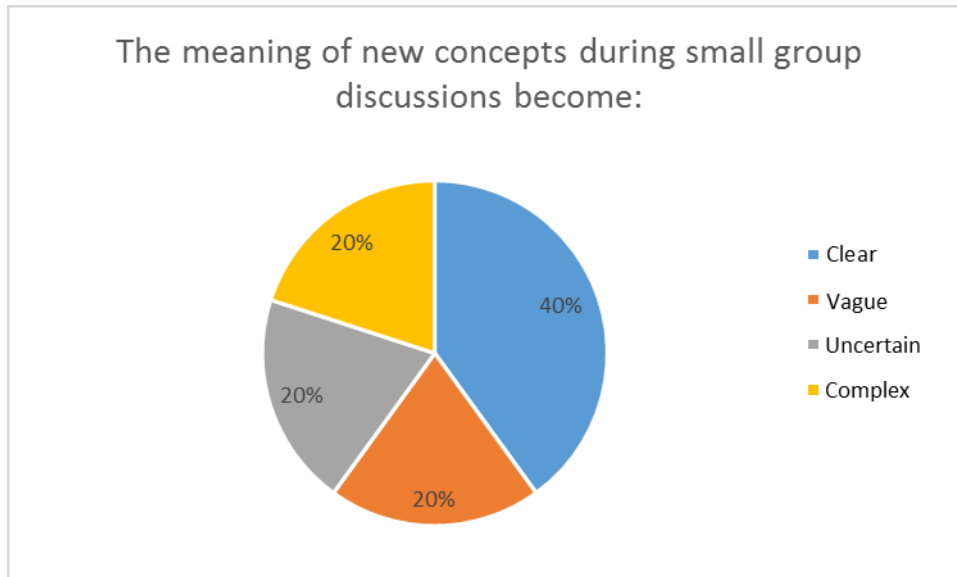


Figure 10 Meaning of concepts during small group discussions

From the graph it is clear that 40% of respondents identify the meaning of new concepts clear during small group discussions, whereas a combined 60% perpetuates the meaning of new concepts as uncertain, vague and complex. Jacques (1991) argues that small group work offers students the opportunity to negotiate meaning through self-expression, but it does not necessarily lead to the understanding of the meaning of concepts. This implies that small group work can only enhance understanding if students have heard of concepts before in other lectures or have discussed these concepts on previous occasions (Gunn, 2007:5).

6 Recommendations

Based on the above findings related to Questions 2, 3, 9, 10, 12 and 13, it is evident that small group work as a teaching strategy can be applied effectively to improve concept understanding. However, the findings on question 5 and 6 interpret that more value is placed on the educator as source of knowledge to provide insight into concepts and Question 14 provides evidence that small group discussions derive meanings of new concepts which can be uncertain, vague and complex.

Based on the above key findings and an extensive literature analysis, a number of recommendations can be made to achieve optimum results when using small group work as a teaching strategy for enhanced concept understanding. The first of these relate to encouraging pre-reading before lectures. Brandt (2014) suggests that prereading before lectures assists students in their learning and improves their performance in class which negates relying on the educator as the primary source of knowledge. Prereading can be assessed through online quiz questions in class.

The second recommendation relates to incorporating online quizzes to assess students' knowledge on concepts after prereading. Davis (2015) suggests using online quizzes such as Socrative or Kahoot to gauge students' understanding of concepts. This also supports the preference of millennials using technology as part of their learning (IEAB, s.a.) Subsequently, small group work can be used after the completion of online quizzes to further build rich and meaningful class discussions to possibly clarify any misunderstandings of concepts (Faculty Innovation Centre, 2016).

The last recommendation proposes well-structured lessons when using small group work with clear outcomes to guide and direct students towards end goals of small group work discussions. The educator should monitor small group work continuously to evaluate group work and remind students of instructions (Brame & Biel, 2016).

7 Conclusion

The above exploratory research investigated how small group work can improve concept understanding through promoting active learning. Findings determined the conditions under which small group work could be effective and in what ways small group work could be used to improve concept understanding with recommendations providing ways on how this teaching strategy could be improved to enhance concept understanding.

To conclude, "involve me and I understand", emphasises the importance of engaging students in classroom activities to enhance their understanding.

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ANNEXURE A: Questionnaire

Study Title: Small group work: An analysis of using this teaching strategy to improve concept understanding.

Dear Respondent

Thank you for reading this.

As your Public Relations educator, I would like to invite you to take part in this research study by completing the following questionnaire. It is entirely your decision whether you would like to participate or not, but your response would be greatly valued and highly appreciated.

You have been identified as a potential respondent as you have been exposed to being a part of a small group as part of a specific module. This study aims to determine whether the use of small group work influences your understanding of concepts within the classroom.

All responses will remain anonymous and your feedback will be used for the purposes of the research only. Please do not include any personal details as the completion of the questionnaire should be completed anonymously and all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality. Responses from completed questionnaires will be collated for analysis. The completed questionnaires will be retained by the researcher until the study is completed.

Also note that you can withdraw from the study at any given time. You will not be penalised in any way should you decide not to participate in this research.

Should you wish to find out more about the research, please feel free to contact me via my email address provided below.

Kind regards



Miss E. Roelofse
(ilse.roelofse@gmail.com)

Questionnaire instructions

- Please read through the questions below and complete them by either writing in an answer or by simply marking the correct box with an "X".
- Please complete all the questions

Question 1

Does small group work form an important part of your lectures?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Question 2

Which characteristics define an effective small group? Indicate for each characteristic if you strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) that it is a characteristic that defines effective small groups.

1. Consists of five to six students

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Work together to discuss topics and share meaning

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. Respect eachother and listening to eachother

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Avoids distractions and staying focussed on the task

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Responsible for their own and one another's learning

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

Question 3

How satisfied are you with the use of small group work during a lesson? Tick the applicable box.

- ☐ Very unsatisfied
- ☐ Unsatisfied
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Very satisfied

Question 4

Do you think it is important for your lecturer to monitor small group interactions in each small group?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Question 5

Do you prefer to discuss concepts with your peers instead of receiving direct instructions from your lecturer?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Question 6

Explain your answer related to the previous question.

Question 7

When given the opportunity to perform small group work, do you contribute to small group discussions? Tick the box most relevant to your view.

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Seldom
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Always

Question 8

Do you think that other students value your input in small group discussions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Question 9

Are you excited to learn new concepts in class through the use of small group work? Tick the box that reflect your view the best.

- ☐ Definitely no
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Yes

☐ Definitely yes

Question 10

Explain your answer relating to the previous question

Question 11

Are you interested in what other students have to say when discussing new concepts in small groups?

- ☐ Not interested at all
- ☐ Not interested
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Interested
- ☐ Very interested

Question 12

Do you find that other students' explanations of new concepts are helpful to your own understanding of new public relations concepts?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Question 13

Explain your answer related to the previous question

Question 14

Indicate your view on the following statement by ticking the box most relevant to your understanding.

The meaning of new concepts during small group discussions become:

- ☐ Confusing
- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Uncertain
- ☐ Vague
- ☐ Clear

Thank you for participating.