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**Proven Ways to Get
Your Message Across**

***The Essential Reference for
Teachers, Trainers,
Presenters, and Speakers***

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Buzz Groups

Definition

Buzz groups are formed by dividing large groups into small discussion groups of 2 to 15 people who meet simultaneously for a specified time to discuss a specific question, problem, or issue. Bellon, Bellon, and Blank (1992) note that such groups allow for an environment that fosters independent, cognitive thinking among group members with less reliance on presenter-based rote memorization.

Introduction

Buzz groups encourage more efficient discussion. They can be used in many different ways and are most often used in combination with other techniques, such as a lecture. Buzz groups set the groundwork to get discussion started. They are most often used when dealing with controversial subjects or difficult questions and problems.

Main Procedural Steps in Using the Buzz Group

Any size group can be divided into buzz groups if there is room available for the groups to get together. The leader begins by dividing the overall group into smaller groups of anywhere from 2 to

15 people. These smaller buzz groups should have room to sit either facing each other or in a circle, which will increase the discussion.

Once the groups are formed, the leader will introduce the issue or problem to be discussed. The issue can be the same for all groups, or each group can have a different phase or subproblem to discuss. The Professional Teacher Education Module Series (1984) suggests narrowing the topic, allowing for participant achievement level, and having time restrictions to prevent a high frustration level among the participants.

Once the issue or problem to be discussed is clarified and understood by each group, the groups should be asked to choose their own leaders and recorders, or the presenter can appoint one for each group.

The group leader makes certain that the members of the group become acquainted with each other, leads the discussion, and tries to get all the members of the group to participate. Williams (1983) offers that buzz groups provide participants with an interactive atmosphere that creates willing participation within a small or large group. The recorder takes notes and prepares a summary to be presented when all the groups come together.

When the buzz groups are very small, with only two or three members, the formality of selecting a group leader and recorder is not necessary. In those cases, the presenter should just ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to present their information at the end of the buzz group session.

The time allowed in the buzz groups should be specified at the beginning and can range anywhere from 2 to 20 minutes, depending on the number of people in each group, the complexity of the issue, and the purpose of the buzz groups. If the buzz groups are mainly designed to help the members get acquainted, for example, then the time needs to be short. If the groups are tackling a difficult problem or subproblem, then more time will be necessary.

While the groups are meeting, the teacher can move from group to group, listening and, when necessary, raising questions to stimulate discussion or bring the discussion back on track. The presenter should be careful not to stay too long at any group so that the members will not direct their questions to him or her.

At the 1- or 2-minute mark, the presenter should sound a warning that time is almost up. When the time has ended, the teacher or discussion leader reconvenes the group into the large group and calls for the reports of the buzz group recorders. After each group has reported, the presenter may want to open the floor to general discussion.

Depending on the complexity of the problem and the purpose of the discussion, the group recorders may be asked to get together later to summarize their findings into a report on the topic discussed.

Buzz groups with more than three people usually involve moving some chairs around so that each group can form its own circle. Circular seating enhances the discussion of each group and helps the members of the group become better acquainted with each other.

Variations of the Buzz Group

Phillips 66 Method

The Phillips 66 variation of buzz groups was developed by J. Donald Phillips. It can be used with small groups or large groups. With this system, the large group is divided into small groups of six persons with as little movement of chairs as possible. The subgroups are then given a 6-minute time limit to discuss the issue or problem.

Clark's 22 Method

The Clark's 22 method is best used when there is little possibility for movement in the room, such as in a large auditorium with stationary seats. Two people discuss the topic for 2 minutes. The presenter or discussion leader then calls for reports from each group.

Huddle Method

In the huddle method, 5 or 6 people meet to discuss the problem. It is much like a football or basketball game huddle wherein the group quickly discusses the alternatives and devises a plan. In the huddle method, the group usually begins by choosing a "captain" or "quarterback" to lead the discussion. Holmes and Mortensen (1983) state that huddle groups are productive because the small group is conducive to natural, nonforced, informal conversation.

Circular Response Method

This method is very similar to the general buzz group method except that responses to the problem or issue are presented according to seating arrangement in the circle. It ensures participation of each group member.

Progressive Buzz Sessions

The progressive sessions are very similar to the general buzz group method except that at a specified time, the groups rotate both topic questions and contributions. This allows each group to work on a number of different topics and still benefit from the written contributions of other group members.

Appropriate Uses, Suggestions, and Cautions

The buzz group method is best used to enhance discussion, especially when the overall group is large. It helps identify the needs and interests of a learning group and sets up a situation where the strong help the weak in a team effort.

Another appropriate use of the buzz group is to get the members acquainted with each other. Often, short versions of the buzz group, such as the Clark's 22 method or Phillips 66 method, can be used as icebreakers or get-acquainted methods.

Buzz groups can also be used when the presenter becomes aware that there are several class members who are hesitant to speak up before the large group. Often the buzz group method helps draw those people out and obtain their contributions.

Buzz groups also allow a large audience to help evaluate the learning experience. Sometimes suggestions for improving a meeting can be developed in a buzz group setting.

Advantages, Disadvantages, and Limitations of the Buzz Group

When using the buzz group instructional strategy, the presenter should be aware of the following advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of this technique.

Advantages of the Buzz Group

1. It allows everyone's ideas to be expressed.
2. Participants learn to work in real-life situations where others' opinions are considered.
3. It sets the groundwork to get discussion started.
4. Because members are expressing opinions, it is good for dealing with controversial subjects.

Disadvantages of the Buzz Group

1. Effectiveness of the group may be lowered by the immature behavior of a few.
2. It may not be effective for younger groups or groups that know each other too well to take each other's opinions seriously.
3. It can be time-consuming when dealing with very large groups.

Limitations of the Buzz Group

1. The group must be well prepared by the teacher in order to keep the group on topic.
2. It is not intended to be a full meeting but used as a supplement to other methods.

Examples or Applications

Buzz groups are most frequently used in combination with the lecture method, which enhances both techniques. Buzz groups can be used to solve a problem, decide on a question to ask the presenter, or review information that has been previously reported.

Once the buzz group reports are given, the teacher has several options. Each recorder and leader can be asked to prepare a short written report on what was discussed, including any revisions made during the group discussion. The recorders can all get together and prepare a full report. Or, during the discussion that follows the buzz group reports, the teacher can outline a plan of action based on the findings of the groups. If necessary, the buzz groups can stay together and become study committees.

Summary

The buzz group is an excellent means of getting total participation by large groups. With a well-prepared presenter and good discussion, the buzz group can be a lively and effective means of learning. Ryan (1992) points out that buzz groups are ideal for the exploration of topics and the revelation of individual and collective opinion.

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The Buzz Group Planning Sheet

Date: _____ Time: _____ Site: _____

Overall Purpose(s) of Session:

Objective(s) of Buzz Session:

Issue(s)/Question(s) for Group Discussion:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Group Formation:

Group Size:

Directions for Forming:

Directions for Group Participation (including discussion and sharing phases):

Set-up Needs:

Handouts:

Summary Notes:

The Buzz Group Evaluation Sheet

(🍏 You may wish to have someone else consider these items, as well as evaluating yourself.)

Was the purpose of the group appropriate for the overall purpose of the learning session? __Yes __No (Explain)

Were directions for forming the group followed?
__Yes __No (Explain)

🍏 Was the issue/question for discussion clearly explained?
__Yes __No (Explain)

How well did each group remain on task during the discussion time?

How well did each group share its thoughts with the entire group?

🍏 How adequate was the time allocation for
... group discussion?
... group sharing?

🍏 How well did the classroom practitioner bring summary/conclusion to the overall session?

Were set-up arrangements satisfactory?
__Yes __No (Explain)

If handouts were needed, were they
... available?
... satisfactory?

🍏 What was the best aspect of the overall session?

🍏 Suggestions for improvement: