



Effective Small Group Learning

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Learning Objectives

- Upon completion of the session the participants will:
 - Recall the principles of small group facilitation
 - Value the importance of pre-work
 - Participate in a small group with a facilitator
 - Identify learning form the small group discussion
 - Debrief the challenges of small group faciltiation



Ice Breaker Question

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 not at all and 5 ready) :
- How prepared are you to facilitate a small group discussion?



AGENDA

- Review key principles of small group facilitation (15 minutes)
- Divide into groups of 6-8 students (5 minutes)
 - Select a facilitator for small group discussion
- Read article (pre-work) for assigned topic (10 minutes)
- Facilitator prepare to start the discussion with group, what is the techniques to start the discussion? (5 min)
- Begin the group learning process (15-20 min)
- Debrief process as a large group (15 min) followed by Q and A (10 min)



Preparation

- What do I want students to learn?
- How do I want them to learn it?
- Is pre-work required?
- How will I know if they learned it?



Why Small Group Learning

- Constructive discussions
- Appropriate and effective questions
- Higher order thinking/reasoning/problem solving
- Foster interpersonal interactions (peers and faculty)



Principle of Small Group Design

- Interaction among those in the group
- 6-8 is best #
- Leadership and learning shared by members of the group



Benefits

- Development of discussion skills and thinking
- Exploration of attitudes
- Sharing of experiences
- Reflection on experiences

Note: these benefits are dependent on the skills of faculty and students



Core Discussion Skills

- Asking questions
- Listening
- Responding
- Explaining
- Opening and Closing
- Preparation (pre-work completion)



Cognitive Skills of Students

- Increased understanding
- Critical thinking
- Reasoning
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Creative thinking
- Supports:
 - Teamwork/leadership
 - Collaborative learning
 - Developing communication competency



Asking Questions

- Arouse interest and curiosity
- Assess knowledge
- Critical thought and evaluation
- Initiate, sustain and direct a conversation
- Types of Questions:
 - Narrow-broad
 - Recall-thought
 - Confused-clear
 - Encourage-threaten



Listening (as a facilitator)

- Surveying/Multiple opinions
- Sorting/Distinguishing points
- Searching/New Information
- Studying/Group Process

Note: important to be able to listen and not respond readily



Responding (as a facilitator)

- Challenge vs. Support
- Fear of criticism vs. a safe learning environment
- Reflecting back-encourages elaboration
- Perception checking-check understanding
- Paraphrasing-using own words
- Silence- *“let us spend a minute thinking about that”*



Explanation

- Clarity and fluency-defining new terms, avoiding vagueness
- Emphasis and interest-tone
- Using examples-use student responses
- Organization-linking words
- Feedback-check for understanding

Note: Best in summary of a session to avoid passivity and early closure



Opening the Session

- R-establish rapport
- E-discuss mutual expectations for faculty and students
 - Aims & Purpose of the session are clear
- S-State structure of the course/session
- T-Relevant task and provide feedback on the task



Closing the Session

- Summary of key points
- Identify linkages
- Identify unanswered questions-next steps
- Point out what was achieved-knowledge & group process
- Encourage self-assessment of individual's role in group
- Thank the group for discussion



Common Errors

- Each student contributes their own point of view, with little relationship to the others or overall context (monologue)
- The discussion is a one-to-one conversation or a series of Q &A between faculty and students



Facilitating Methods

- Plan the seating arrangements
- Pose a problem or question
- Allow think time
- Foster student to student discussion



Techniques

- Buzz groups (think-pair-share)
- Snow balls
- Jigsaws
- Fishbowls
- Concept maps
- Brainstorming

Note: decide if you need a small plenary as an opening or summary



Research

- Success depends on the skill sand motivation of the faculty and to a lesser extent on the skills and motivation of the students
- Effectiveness is dependent on how the method is used



Dynamics of Groups

- Forming-requires more direction
- Norming-developing a mutual understanding
- Storming-rebellion or disagreement/controversy
- Performing-commitment and productivity

Note: Reflect on learning process and not just be task oriented; promote cooperation vs. competition



Evaluation

Types

- Processes
 - How did the group perform today?
- Product
 - Formative
 - **What was learned today**
 - **What is unclear?**

How to collect data?

- Qualitative/Quantitative
- Students/facilitator/peers



Summary

- Faculty and students have roles that overlap:
 - TO PREPARE
 - TO DISCUSS...
 - TO THINK ...
 - TO REFLECT...



Summary-continued

- Prepare the learning environment
- Provide a structure that is friendly and focused
- keep discussion moving forward
- Summarize discussions and develop student thinking
- Students contribute to discussions in a thoughtful way
 - ask questions and provide comments but not conclusions



Summary Question

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 not at all and 5 ready) :
- How prepared are you to facilitate a small group discussion?
- One-minute paper