Effective Small Group Learning & Facilitation

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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 facilitation
  - Discuss the components of formative assessment:
    - learner self-assessment,
    - faculty assessment of learners
    - learner assessment of faculty
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 learners (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
Group vs Collaborative Learning

- Collaborative learning: activities may differ considerably, but there is a focus on students’ exploration or application of the course content, not the teacher’s presentation.

- Group work: can improve productivity but is only collaborative learning if a “divide and conquer” process is not supported.

- Group and collaborative work must be designed to incorporate different perspectives, experiences, knowledge and skills
Group vs Collaborative Learning

- Accountability - not based on grades-based on assessment of identified competencies.
- Learners are mutually dependent on each other but are held individually accountable
- Emphasis on process and product
- Impacts social skills of learners
- Faculty must do pre-planning for a collaborative group activity
All faculty receive training, which includes direct observation and feedback on small group facilitation and student feedback.
PEARLS: Faculty Expectations

- Assess group each session utilizing PEARLS pillars
- Frame appropriate and thoughtful wrap-up questions
- Encourage group to strive for and achieve excellence through role modeling, active engagement and wrap-up frames
PEARLS: Student Expectations

- Students & faculty ready to go at start of sessions
- Begin with check-in/self-assessment
- Every student responsible for researching each LO
- Leader, timekeeper, scribe; rotate
- Groups responsible for generating higher order discussions
PEARLS: Faculty Expectations

- AVOID GIVING CONTENT!
- Explain the "why" behind the non-negotiables / student expectations and pedagogy
- Describe and recognize a higher order discussion
- Utilize probing questions: depth, breadth, integration, higher order learning, clarity
  - Why?
  - How does the mechanism correlate with the clinical findings?
  - Why are we doing/discussing this?
  - Are we ready to move on?
  - Is everyone clear on______?
Benefits

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

Note: these benefits on dependent on the skills of faculty and students
Core Discussion Skills

- Asking questions
- Listening
- Responding
- Explaining
- Opening (check-in and question) and Closing (wrap-up)
- 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/mind maps
- Brainstorming

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

- Success depends on the skills and 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?
  - How did I 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
Guiding Principles for our Curriculum Design

- True to our mission, values, and drivers
- Fully integrated, developmental, four-year science and clinical curriculum
- Integration of health, disease (normal and abnormal), and intervention
- An “adult learner” environment that values independent study and self-directed learning
- Built upon experiential and active small group case-based learning
- Conceptual knowledge in action, not memorizing facts
- Early meaningful patient interactions with emphasis on both individual and population health
- Emphasis on scholarship, critical thinking, and lifelong learning
- Focused on learning rather than teaching
- Assessment drives learning
- Emphasis on reflection, assessment, and transformation
Spiral curriculum: Content is revisited at multiple points in time; increased difficulty, greater depth, consistent with current context