Effective Small Group Learning

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North Shore LIJ

HOFSTRA NORTH SHORE-LIJ
SCHOOL of MEDICINE
AT HOUSTON UNIVERSITY
Preparation

- What do I want students to learn?
- How do I want them to learn it?
- 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
Cognitive Skills of Students

- Increased understanding
- Critical thinking
- Reasoning
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Creative thinking

Supports:
- Teamwork
- Collaborative learning
- Developing communication competency
Asking Questions

- Arouse interest and curiosity
- Assess knowledge
- Critical thought and evaluation
- Initiate, sustain and direct a conversation

Types:
- Narrow-broad
- Recall-thought
- Confused-clear
- Encourage-threaten
Listening

- Skimming
- Surveying
- Sorting
- Searching
- Studying
Responding

- 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
- 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
- Thank the group for discussion
- Point out what was achieved
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 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/controversary
- **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 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