Effective Small Group Teaching

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Outline

• Introduction and brainstorming
• Educational theory
• Establishing the ground rules
• Role of the facilitator
• Video triggers
• Closure and feedback
• Wrap-up and evaluations

Objectives

• Explain the educational theory that supports small group learning
• Describe facilitator and learner behaviors that promote effective small group learning
• Utilize teaching skills that promote more effective small group learning
• Develop skills to manage common small group challenges
Small Group Learning Theory

Constructivist Theory (theory of knowledge)

- Learning: an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge
- Learners build upon their current/past knowledge
- Learners assimilate & accommodate utilizing cognitive structures
  - Comparative thinking, logical reasoning, symbolic representation
- Learners test hypotheses & interpret info through social negotiation
  - "go beyond the information given"

Constructivist Implications

- The instructor:
  - is a facilitator
  - is concerned with the experiences & contexts enabling student to learn
  - structures content/translations info so it can be easily grasped by the student
  - engages in an active dialogue (e.g. socratic learning)
  - stimulates students' cognitive structure development
  - encourages extrapolation or "filling in the gaps"
Small Groups Provide Opportunities to:

| Elaborate          | Shared dialogue  
|                   | Discussion  
|                   | Summary  

| Generate and transform | Projects  
|                        | Tables  
|                        | Labs  
|                        | Papers  
|                        | Concept maps  

| Apply | Cases  
|       | Role play  
|       | Demonstration  
|       | Exercises  

| Generalize | Apply to new, different problems  

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Advantages of Small Groups

- Students
  - Active learning (students help shape what is learned)
  - Dynamic interaction between students and teachers
  - Collaboration between learners
  - Build shared and individual understanding
  - Develop skills: learning, interpersonal, communication, social interaction, & team work
  - Peer evaluation & self-reflection

- Instructors
  - Stimulate personal growth
  - Real-time feedback
  - Reflect
  - Relationship building

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Disadvantages of Small Groups

- Requires additional faculty
- Requires robust faculty development
- Faculty must be comfortable with fluidity
- Management of group dynamics
- May increase extraneous cognitive load for learners
- May confuse the progress of the group with an individual’s progress
Learning Approaches

- Active Learning
- Elaboration
- Collaborative Learning
  - Motivation & Collaboration
- Critical Reflection
  - Integration, Values, & Attitude
- Promoting Transfer and Application
  - Application
- Learning Through Participation
  - Modeling

From "Methods for Teaching Medicine"
Kelley Skiff, PhD & Georgede Stratos, PhD

Potential Roles of the Instructor

- Leader
- Tutor
- Guide
- Mentor
- Facilitator
- Coach
- Devil's Advocate

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Preparing for Small Group Teaching

- Size and mix of learners
- Position within the curriculum
- Purpose (goals & objectives) of the teaching session
- Learners' prior experience/competence
- Resources
5 Stages of Group Development

Effective Small Group Teaching: Strategies for Group Formation

Your First Meeting

- Room arrangement
- Introductions & ice-breakers
- Role clarification
- Discuss how learners will be evaluated
- Review goals
- Discuss ground rules
Goals

- Initial session & each subsequent session following brief check-in
- Discuss pre-formulated (course) goals
- Solicit and develop learning goals per individual

Ground Rules and Expectations

- Initial session & in subsequent sessions
- Solicit group regarding desired ground rules
- Logistical
- Process-oriented
- Spirit

Ground Rules: Logistical

- Arrive on time
- Complete pre-session work
- Laptops away and cell phones off
- Dress
- Participation
Ground Rules: Process

- Vegas rule (confidentiality)
- Speak for yourself: “I/me” not “you/they”
- Share air time
- No interruptions (one at a time)
- Non-coercive (not share or die)
- Disagree with ideas, not person originating them
- Address group, not facilitator

Ground Rules: Spirit

- Assume positive intent from everyone
- Generous listening
- Presence
- Critical curiosity (not judgmental)
- Beginner’s mind
- Seek to understand
- Be radically non-defensive
- Congruence (be yourself, you are not a mask)

Facilitating Effective Group Discussions: Tips
Effective Small Group Facilitators

• Prepare for each session
• Create an inclusive environment
• Keep discussions constructive and positive
• Encourage participants
• Provide formative feedback frequently

Create an inclusive environment

Do’s:

• Create a non-threatening group atmosphere
• Be clear up front about expectations and intentions
• Use inclusive language
• Treat participants with respect and consideration
• Provide sufficient time and space for participants to gather their thoughts and contribute to discussions
• Provide opportunities for participants to pair-share

Create an inclusive environment

Don’ts:

• Use language that will exclude certain groups or make them uncomfortable
• Assume participants all have the same expectations
• Over-generalize behavior or have stereotypical expectations of participants
• Use or allow disrespectful language or non-verbal communication
• Convey a sense of self-importance or superiority
• Allow only the dominant to take over the conversation
• Discourage alternate views or counter-arguments
Keep discussions constructive and positive

- Make discussion functional by clarifying goals of each session
- Establish ground rules
- Keep group on task
- Step back when a group is functional

Encourage participants

- Ask follow-up questions, paraphrase comments, initiate and probe questions
- Ask for further clarification if needed
- Re-visit past contributions if needed
- Encourage others to add their reactions or ideas to someone’s comment
- Do not be afraid to admit your own ignorance or confusion if you don’t know something

VIDEOS
Closure and Feedback

Delivering Feedback
• Feedback exercise
• Timing
• Environment
• Self-Assessment
• Be Specific
• Develop an action plan

Small group specific issues
• Contributions to group discussion
• Professionalism
• Peer feedback
• Personality
Closure

- Summarize key learning issues of the day
- Identify items that need further investigation
- Assign "learning issues"
- Confirm time, location, and objectives of next group meeting time
- "Check out"