Effective Small Group Teaching

Office of Medical Education
Creighton University School of Medicine
Module Objectives

After completing this module, the learner will be able to

• Describe educational outcomes of small group learning
• Describe strategies for developing effective groups
• Modify a checklist for preparing to teach in small groups
• Describe attributes of an effective small group teacher
What is small group teaching?

3 Criteria
1. Active participation
2. Face-to-face contact
3. Purposeful activity

(Newble and Cannon, 2001)
This is NOT small group teaching

• Lecturing to a small number of learners
• Conversations in a small room
• Study sessions with an occasional appearance by the teacher
Advantages of small groups

• Small size promotes engagement
• Increased contact time with instructor
• Opportunity to target teaching and assessment
• Move from recall of facts to analysis, criticism, and other higher-order thinking skills
Small groups are rehearsals

- Opportunity for “rehearsing” material learned in lecture
- Make connections between concepts
- Contextualize the subject matter
- Students develop skills necessary to work in a group or team setting
- Opportunities for reflection on learning
Types of small groups

- Tutorial
- Case Study
- Problem Based Learning (PBL)
- Team Based Learning (TBL)
- Problem-solving
- Seminar

(Bligh 2000; Jacques 2003)
Group Process: 4 Stages

• Forming
• Storming
• Norming
• Performing

(Tuckman 1967; Scholtes et al., 2003)

Understanding the process of group development provides insight into how and why your group functions. Effective groups take time and effort!
1: Forming

- Excitement, anticipation, and optimism
- May have suspicion, fear, and anxiety
- Make decisions about ground rules

An effective leader helps the group

- Become acquainted
- Clarify roles
- Develop plans
2: Storming

• Resistance to tasks and methods
• Arguments, defensiveness, tension
• Concern about excessive work

An effective leader helps the group resolve issues of authority and power.
3: Norming

- Sense of cohesion develops
- Acceptance of team members
- Increased discussion and constructive criticism

An effective group leader encourages respect, acknowledges collective experience, promotes collaboration.
4: Performing

- Members have better understanding of others’ strengths and weaknesses
- Satisfaction with progress
- Ability to work through problems

An effective group leader monitors progress and provides feedback.
Getting Started

- Discuss your role with the course director
- Review the material to be covered before and during the session
- Create an agenda for the session, with approximate times for each activity or content area
At the Session

- Introduce yourself. Mention your education, professional role, and interests
- Ask students to introduce themselves
- Sit where you can see everyone
- Appoint a timekeeper if this will help keep you on schedule
- Discuss group rules and norms. How will you handle phones? Laptops? Food? Late arrivals? Unprepared students?
At the Session

- Start with a brief review. Invite questions from the previous lecture/session.

- Mention relevant news or a recent case. This helps to engage students and remind them of the relevance to future practice.

- Preview the agenda for the session.

- Be clear about the agenda for the session. Students are more likely to engage if they trust the session will begin and end on time.
Session Leadership

- Encourage participation
- Be consistent with expectations for participation
- Use open-ended questions
- Allow time...and then wait... for students to reply to questions
- Close the session with a wrap-up of key points and questions
## Troubleshooting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Suggested Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only a few people participate</td>
<td>Pair learners to discuss a question and then ask pairs to report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Group disengages during session              | • Share a relevant case from your work  
• Switch to a different activity or break activity into separate tasks                                                                       |
| 1 or 2 group members monopolize the session  | • Redirect the discussion to others  
• Discuss this concern with the learner(s), outside of the class  
• Avoid making eye contact with this learner                                                                                 |
| Learner speaks only to you                   | • Provide a non-verbal cue by looking around the group when you speak and when the learner speaks                                                  |

(Muller and Irby, 2005; Jacques, 2003)
Summary: Part I

Study of student perceptions of effective small group teaching (Steinert 2004)

Students described effective small group leaders:

• Did not lecture
• Promoted thinking and problem solving
• Not threatening
• Highlighted clinical relevance
• Wanted to be there
Summary: Part II

Characteristics of an effective group:
• Non-threatening learning environment
• Clinically relevant and integrated content
• Active participation and group interaction
• Able to ask questions
• Work as a team and learn from each other
• Cases that promote thinking and problem solving

(Steinert 2004)
References


References


(Created By: Kathryn N. Huggett, Ph.D., October 2014)