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 facilitation
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?
  - What are your types of small groups? Purpose?
  - Key experiences as facilitators?
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 on 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”
Explanations

- 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...
if you need a small plenary as an opening or summary

- Buzz groups (think-pair-share)
- Snow balls
- Jigsaws
- Fishbowls
- Concept maps
- Brainstorming
Small Group Practice
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?

- Product
  - Formative
    - What was learned today
    - What is unclear?

How to collect data?

- Qualitative/Quantitative
- Students/facilitator/peers
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