Structuring Small Group Experiences for Meaningful Interactions

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Small Group Discussion Skills: Creating Structure for Student Engagement and Retention
Why Use Small Groups:

- Help prepare students for clinical situations where they will work on teams, interact with others in change-of-shift rounds, etc.

- Contribute to increased engagement due to higher levels of interactivity and application

- Improve long-term retention and integration by allowing students to better connect new information with existing knowledge
Types of Discussion Questions

- Analysis: “How would you explain…”
- Compare/Contrast: “How would you explain the differences between…”
- Cause/Effect: “Describe the connection between…”
- Clarification: “What is meant by ….”
- Send a problem: Students generate complex questions on index cards with the appropriate answers on the back. Cards are redistributed among groups for students to discuss, allowing for revised answers.
- Student-generated: Have students submit questions for discussion prior to the beginning of class
Not all groups are created equal...

What are the risks of small group discussion and learning?
Set the Stage for Group Learning

- Come prepared by developing discussion questions that will engage students in various types of conversations including analysis, compare/contrast, further clarification, etc.

- Show some restraint: make sure you don’t take over the conversation as the expert in the room

- Use questions to initiate discussion, encourage participation, and keep the discussion focused

- Make sure you summarize key components of each discussion before moving on to a different topic
What are some of the essential elements of effective small group discussion?
● Establish a goal(s) for the discussion as connected with the learning objective
● Select an effective group size and seat students so that conversation is easy
● Select the appropriate material for students to discuss
● Set clear expectations for students & ensure equal contributions
● Consider assigning roles (recorder, facilitator, reporter, etc.)
● Facilitate the discussion and encourage conversation by turning questions back to students, pausing, etc.
● Set appropriate time limits and make them clear to students
● Summarize the conversation and connect it to larger goals
● Consider evaluating the conversation - peer feedback, etc.
Potential Scenarios for Using Small Groups

- Working through a case study
- Developing a skill set
- Approaching a clinical problem
- Walking through procedures
- Comparing/contrasting different perspectives to encourage a diverse viewpoint and build empathy
- Comparing/contrasting different arguments in journal articles to examine effectiveness of evidence
- Role-playing interactions with a client or colleague
Workshop:

- Consider an upcoming teaching experience using groups:
  - What is the goal of that small group experience?
  - How is the small group experience connected with the learning objectives for the day?
  - How will you structure the group experience for students? How will you prepare them for success?
  - Come up with questions you will have students discuss that help students to apply knowledge.
  - How will you evaluate the quality of the discussion?
More Techniques for Small Groups
Constructive Controversy: 4 students per group

1. 2 students take pro side, 2 take con side → Task is to prepare their argument
2. 1 student from each side pair up and present their best argument
3. Opposites engage in open respectful debate
4. Individuals reverse their position and present the opposing sides’ argument as accurately and enthusiastically as possible
5. All members of the group come back together and write a statement integrating the best information from both sides of the controversy

Think-Aloud-Pair -- Three students per group

1. Divide students into groups of three
2. Give each group a problem, case history, etc. to discuss
3. Have groups designate an explainer, a questioner, and a recorder
4. Explainer describes how they would solve the problem, analyze the case, etc.
5. Questioner asks questions when the explanation is not clear or is incomplete. They can also ask questions that might give hints that generate new or better explanations.
6. Recorder records the explanations through notes and/or diagrams.
7. After 10 minutes, the explainer presents to the whole group, the questioner shares what types of questions he/she asked.

References: