Small Group Learning in Medical Education

MS4 Teaching Elective
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Benefits . . .  Challenges . . .

Small Group Teaching

• Active participation
  Teaching and learning brought about through discussion among all present (size)
• Face-to-face contact
  Effective discussion requires verbal and nonverbal communication (room setup)
• Purposeful activity
  Identify & communicate purpose/task (learning objectives)
Small Group Teaching includes:

1) Managing a small group –
   - Personalities
   - Learning Styles
   - Cultural/generational differences
   - Prior knowledge
   - Student behaviors

2) Task – clarification of purpose, expectations, roles

3) Maintenance – open, trustful, supporting climate for discussion; responsibility of students & teacher

Managing: strive to have problems in group, solved by the group --

- Dominant group member
- Reticent group member
- "Jokey" or offensive group member
- Late or absent group member
- Over-dependent group member

Task: Structure in small group teaching

Develop clear learning objectives
Plan session
   - proceed with a purpose
   - flow of session
   - time efficient / awareness / flexibility
Adapt role to task
Maintenance: Evaluating small group teaching and learning

Product – achievement of task(s); objectives of session met

Process – method used to achieve objectives
  Did everyone in the group participate?
  Did student(s) take responsibility for their learning?
  Did the group work effectively?

Expectations of Learners

“in small group learning, the positive commitment of the individual learner is critical to it's success.”

• Preparation
• Active and constructive contribution to session
• Effectively reflecting on issues raised
• Evaluation and feedback

Expectations of Teachers

• Prepare for sessions
• Try to be the first to arrive, not the last
• Initially, states objectives and initiates process
• Invites learner input and promotes discussion
• As group develops, facilitates a process in which learners together provide much of the initiative, explore options, test hypothesis, develop solutions, review outcomes
PCM EXPECTATIONS:

Students are expected to:

1. Have good interaction skills.
2. Be prepared and participate in the group.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the material or facility with the skill(s) taught.

Faculty facilitators are expected to:

1. Guide, not teach. They will adopt a non-directive policy thereby putting the responsibility for problem solving directly on the group.
2. Draw out points of view and comments from the members of the group.
3. Provide structure and conceptual summaries of the discussions so that the general "lessons" can be identified.
4. Attend all faculty development sessions to become the best facilitators and advisors possible.

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Summary –

Benefits of small groups:
• encouragement of independent self-learning
• critical thinking and problem solving
• awareness of the views of others

Successful small group learning:
• effective facilitators
• positive group atmosphere
• fostering of collaboration
• adherence to small group goals
• clinical relevance; promote problem solving