

Small Group Teaching – key theories and methods

1. What the literature tells us about using small groups for learning
2. Factors influencing the success of small group learning
3. Small group teaching methods
4. Managing difficult groups/students; tips and pitfalls

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1. What the literature tells us about using small groups

It is useful to firstly remind ourselves what constitutes a small group.

Fisher and Ellis (1990) emphasise that most of the definitions of a group indicate the **sharing** element among members as the key factor which defines the existence of a group. The sharing can be around perceptions, motivation or goals, as well as around tasks, such as in a scenario group session. This sharing element can be greatly influenced by the **group dynamic** or climate of the group.

The **structure** of the group is another defining element - the roles, norms, values and power relationships that influence the behaviour of group members and tie them to the group, providing the 'glue' of group structure. The structure of a group can influence the level and success of interaction in a group.

Small group work (also known as cooperative or collaborative learning or peer learning) involves a high degree of **interaction**. The effectiveness of learning groups is determined by the extent to which the interaction enables members to clarify their own understanding, build upon each other's contributions, sift out meanings, ask and answer questions.

Secondly, what does the literature tell us? Studies have shown that when looking at long term retention, the **ability to apply knowledge and solve problems, critical thinking and development of positive attitudes**, results consistently favour small discussion classes (McKeachie & Kulik, 1975, McKeachie, 1994). Jaques (2004) argues that the purposes and benefits of group learning coincide closely with the goals of higher education in general.

Benefits of learning in small groups include:

- allowing students to discover and engage with a range of perspectives, ideas, and backgrounds
- providing students the opportunity for more active involvement

- assisting students to clarify their attitudes to and ideas about the subject matter, as they test their own ideas and attitudes against those of others
- helping students develop a sense of academic rigour and a willingness to share ideas
- providing opportunities for students to receive more immediate feedback on their learning
- encouraging students towards self-directed and independent learning
- providing more opportunities for peer learning and sharing responsibility for learning
- providing opportunities for students to more easily gain awareness of their emotional reactions
- providing opportunities for students to learn and develop cooperative behaviour including critical thinking and the process of group problem solving
- more easily establishing rapport between teacher and student
- providing more opportunity to develop skills in communication (listening, responding, interacting) and interpersonal relations

References

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2. Factors influencing the success of small group learning

Group Climate

Group climate is the general psychological or emotional state of the group. You may be able to identify from your own experience, groups in which the climate was suspicious, competitive or antagonistic. In such situations it is unlikely that much learning will happen. Some groups have a set of formal rules governing such things as attendance (eg. Scenario groups sessions require 80% attendance) and preparation (eg. students must do the required reading before each class). Even more powerful though is the set of informal rules, which are established over time as the group members learn to work with each other.

David Jaques (1991) points out that many of the difficulties that students have with expressing themselves in groups stem from uncertainty about what the rules of the game are. They may believe that they would be stepping on the group leader's toes if they were to propose topics for discussion, ask questions, or propose a change in direction or procedure. Because they don't want to embarrass a fellow student they may be reluctant to ask questions about another student's opinion or presentation. Students may be afraid to speak up for fear that they will be ridiculed or embarrassed if they make a mistake. For all of these reasons it is productive to devote some time to establishing 'ground rules' for how the group should operate.

You can do this by suggesting some rules to the group and having them discuss and agree on which they would like to use. Rules which are often proposed, include –

- Students can initiate or redirect discussion
- Speakers will be allowed to finish what they have to say
- Speak whenever you wish but after you have spoken try waiting until two or three others have contributed before speaking again, to avoid having a few people dominate
- Treat other people and their contributions with respect
- Everyone takes responsibility for the working of the group process

Group Structure

Group members need to understand what is expected of them. In learning groups, this means that the instructions for any activities are clearly spelled out. Roles such as leader, recorder or reporter are allocated or negotiated and clearly agreed. Everyone understands exactly what has to be achieved and what the time frame is.

Role clarity is particularly important. This includes the role, skills and behaviours of the leader/facilitator of the group. Once a group is well established group leaders/facilitators and members should share many of the group building and the task roles. In the initial stages, it is often up to the group leader/facilitator to diagnose what is needed and ensure that essential social functions occur (such as ensuring that everyone is introduced, that people know something about other members in the group so that they will feel comfortable expressing opinions in front of them) and that essential task functions also occur (everyone is clear about the purpose of the group, the kinds of activities that will be undertaken and the way the group will operate.)

Important roles when facilitating small group learning most commonly relate to supporting the group by building and maintaining good relationships among group members and getting the tasks done. The behaviours associated with these roles are detailed below.

a) Maintaining and supporting the group

These behaviours or roles are aimed at developing the social side of the group. They contribute to building good relationships among members. The examples are based on Jaques (1991).

Encouraging - being friendly, warm and responsive to others, acknowledging others and their ideas, agreeing with and accepting the contributions of others.

For example, *"Hafeez, why don't you tell all of us what you told me about the observations you made in clinical?"*

Mediating - harmonizing, conciliating differences in point of view, making compromises

by saying, *"Other people here might be as worried as you are Aeysha, about the delay in treatment for Mrs Bruce, but we need to take a second look at some of the possible reasons. You had something to say about that, Sue...?"*

Diagnosing - determining and pointing out blocks to group progress -

"we seem to be going over the same ground all over again, is that because we've run out of new ideas?"

Consensus Taking - testing group opinions and decisions by stating them and asking whether or not members agree

"What you're saying Liz is that we should limit the time each member speaks on this issue, is that what other members are thinking?"

Gate Keeping - trying to make it possible for another member to make a contribution, or suggesting limited taking-time for everyone so that all will have a chance to be heard.

"We haven't heard from everyone yet, let's see, Jim, then Sunil."

Standard Setting - expressing standards for the group to use in choosing its subject matter or procedures, rules of conduct, ethical values.

"It is important that everyone feels free to express an opinion in the group, that's the first ground rule, the next..."

Following - going along with the group, accepting the ideas of others, serving as an audience during group discussion, being a good listener.

"That's a good point", "I see", "Let me check with you to see whether I've understood the point you were making"

Relieving Tension - draining off negative feeling by joking or diverting attention from unpleasant to pleasant matters".

"Am I right, we all seem a bit tense at present - let's take a few moments and get some fresh air..." or "I can assure you, this subject is not nearly as difficult as I seem to be making it"

Many of us, who are concerned to get the task done efficiently, tend to underestimate the importance of these behaviours aimed at making the group a pleasant and rewarding place to be. But if they are lacking it is unlikely that the group will perform effectively. Some people will drop out, others will withdraw and make little contribution, a few will dominate and just about everyone will feel that their time and work is under-appreciated.

b) Getting the task done

This can include:

Initiating - suggesting new ideas or a changed way of looking at the group problem or goal, proposing new activities.

Information seeking - asking for relevant facts or information.

Information giving - providing relevant facts or authoritative information or relating personal experience pertinent to the group task.

Opinion Seeking - asking for opinions, judgements or feelings of other group members, seeking clarification of values.

Opinion Giving - stating a pertinent belief or opinion about something the group is considering.

Elaborating - building on a previous comment, enlarging on it, giving examples.

Coordinating - showing or clarifying the relationships among various ideas, trying to pull ideas and suggestions together.

Orienting - defining the progress of the discussion in terms of the group's goals, raising questions about the direction the discussion is taking.

Testing - checking with the group to see if it is ready to make a decision or to take some action.

Energising - stimulating the group, encouraging activity and movement toward group goals

Summarising - revising the content of past discussion

Recording - writing down ideas, suggestions or decisions made by the group

Timekeeping – keeping the group on schedule or to plan.

The roles of group support and the task roles listed above reflect the positive aspects of group work. In reality, some of the behaviour that occurs in groups is not productive and prevents the group from making progress. This is likely to be self-centred behaviour that does not contribute to the group goals but satisfies personal needs. 'Nonfunctional' roles are listed below and can apply equally to students or teachers/facilitators of small groups.

c) Nonfunctional Behaviour

Monopolizing - talking so often or so long that others do not get a chance to speak.

Blocking - interfering with the progress of the group by going off on a tangent, citing personal experiences unrelated to the group's problem, arguing too much on a point the rest of the group has resolved, rejecting ideas without consideration, preventing a vote.

Aggression - criticising or blaming others, showing hostility toward the group or some individual without relation to what has happened in the

group, attacking the motives of others, deflating the ego or status of others.

Seeking Recognition - attempting to call attention to one's self by excessive talking, extreme ideas, boasting, boisterousness.

Special Pleading - introducing or supporting ideas related to one's own pet concerns or philosophies beyond reason, attempting to speak 'for the grass roots', the 'patients', 'the common man', and so on.

Withdrawing - day-dreaming, sleepiness, becoming indifferent or passive, resorting to excessive formality, doodling, whispering to others.

We will cover some strategies for dealing with problem behaviour in **Managing difficult groups/students; tips and pitfalls**

References

JAQUES, D (1991) *Learning In Groups*, (2nd ed) Kogan Page, London.

3. Small group teaching methods

Good small group work rarely just happens. It relies to a great extent on preparation by the teacher and involves being clear about what the session is designed to achieve, identifying useful problems, cases or other material which might form the basis of learning and identifying crucial questions which will get people thinking.

Planning your small group session

Before meeting with your group you need to plan your session. At the very least make sure you review the following:

Content:

What are the most important points for the session? What are the likely errors that students may make in trying to understand the topic/issue/skill? Are there important principles, or key concepts that you want students to understand?

Aims:

It is important to be clear about what you want to achieve in your small group teaching session. Brookfield (1990) suggests that the following aims are well suited to discussion-based teaching. Consider whether any of these could describe the aims of your small group teaching:

1. To engage students in exploring a range of perspectives and discovering new perspectives
2. To emphasize the complexity and ambiguity of issues, topics or themes.
3. To help students recognize the assumptions underlying their habitual ideas and behaviours.
4. To increase intellectual agility
5. To encourage active listening
6. To increase students' interest and involvement with a topic;
7. To show students that their opinions and experiences are valued;
8. To help develop a sense of group identity;
9. To encourage democratic habits such as valuing participation, respect for others' opinions and tolerance of diversity.

Activities and Questions:

What kinds of activities might you use or what kinds of questions might you ask that help to raise students' interest in this topic, establish what is and is not an example of this concept or condition, expose students' misunderstandings and/or help students understand the complexities of this issue?

Conditions:

How might you need to modify what you can do according to the number of students, the time available, and the space you are working in? For example, should you break the students up into smaller groups for all or part of the session? There are many different reasons why you might want to split your group up into smaller subgroups; to give everyone an opportunity to discuss an issue or to get some 'hands-on' experience in a new skill or technique; to encourage quieter students; to discourage the more dominant students. Although the physical arrangement of chairs and tables is one of the most basic tasks in providing comfort, it is also highly influential in the flow of discussion in the group.

Techniques for Small Group Work

In small group work the teacher or facilitator sets up activities, asks questions, listens and responds to students' comments and questions, occasionally explaining, often asking further questions. S/he is often the one to pull the session to a close, by summarising the understanding that has been reached and the questions that remain. Students too, ask and answer questions, explain their ideas and summarise each other's arguments.

It follows that the skills needed in small group teaching are predominantly questioning, listening, responding, explaining, and summarising and that students need to develop them just as much as teachers. In addition, teachers need to be able to prepare materials and activities for students to work on and they need to be able to prepare students so that they understand what small group teaching is about and develop the skills described above.

Many different techniques have been developed to accomplish the different purposes of small group learning. We will look briefly at two, discussion groups and briefing and debriefing practical, clinical or experiential learning.

Discussion groups (open)

A good discussion class allows students the opportunity to expose their individual conceptions and misconceptions and to compare their ideas with those of others. Cognitively, the act of putting material into one's own words is a very important step in developing understanding, as well as providing an opportunity to begin using the language of the discipline.

One important point to be made about open discussion is that although it appears to be quite spontaneous and even chaotic, its success depends to a considerable extent on students doing some preparatory work and on the questions that the teacher/facilitator poses in order to start the discussion.

Educational reasons for questioning may differ from clinical purposes. They include to

- stimulate learning and thinking
- assist the learner in organizing and clarifying concepts
- correct misunderstandings or faulty reasoning
- assist in showing special or obscure relationships
- strengthen the learner's ability to synthesize and analyse
- correct attitudes or behaviour.

Teachers/facilitators have an interesting dilemma here. The choice is basic to the whole philosophy of teaching and learning in the clinical professions. Clinical teachers must ensure that the student '*gets the right answer*' in the interests of patient safety. But is learning the right answer on this particular patient the best path to being right on the next patient when the teacher is not there? What is the focus of your small group session? *Knowing that...or Knowing how to work it out?*

The issue for each clinical teacher is how much to concentrate on 'the facts' and how much on 'reasoning from the facts'. What may seem to be a quibble about balance, actually profoundly affects the way a tutorial is conducted. To polarize the extremes, some tutorials are a 'lecture to a small group' or a question and answer session - teacher questions, student answers. Or, alternatively, the session may function around student questions, hypotheses and guesses to be explored and justified; and the teacher is used by students as a resource, not as the source.

The teaching skills needed are quite different between the two approaches. The position of the teacher in relation the students is quite different. Some teachers are very uncomfortable at being questioned by students. Some students resent not being told the facts which the teacher obviously knows.

Some question types that are useful to use in discussions include

Asking for more evidence: How do you know that? What data is that claim based on? Do you have any evidence for that?

Asking for clarification: Can you put that another way? Can you give us an example of what you are talking about? What do you mean by...?

Open questions: How ... do you think that may work? Why ...

Linking questions: Is there any connection between what you've just said and what X said...? How does your idea support what has been said so far? Hypothetical questions: How would this change if the xxx was xxx?

Cause and effect questions: What would be the effect of?

Summary and synthesis: What are two of the most important ideas that have emerged from this discussion? What do you understand better as a result of this discussion? What remains unresolved or contentious?

Brookfield and Preskill (1999) suggest that discussion topics are always more interesting when framed as a question rather than a statement. It's also important to pick a topic that is not too factual or uncontroversial. You may well want students to acquire quite a lot of factual information but they can equally well learn it by considering questions like – What are two feasible explanations for what's going on here? When is it *not* desirable to intervene with the standard treatment?

Apart from using a provocative question to start discussion, Brookfield and Preskill suggest the following strategies:

Frame the discussion around student questions

Split students into pairs or small groups (3-5) and ask them to identify what they think are the most important questions that need to be answered about a particular case, situation or problem. Questions can then be put on the board and agreement reached about which are the most important or interesting ones which will be addressed first. Students can also be given this task as homework so that they come to the class with questions prepared.

Start with a sentence completion exercise

Students are asked to choose one of the following statements and complete it, then to share their statement with a subgroup if the class is large or the whole group if it is not. In the groups students can choose the statement that they find most interesting and want to explore further.

The statements:

What most struck me about the reading (or lecture / case / data / other stimulus material) was.....

The point I most take issue with in the reading etc was.....

The point I found most confusing was.....

The question I would most like to ask the author / patient / consultant is...

The part of that experience I found most confusing was....

Generate truth statements

In small groups ask students to generate statements which they believe to be true about the topic. This technique may be particularly useful when dealing with a topic about which there are many popular misconceptions. The complexity and ambiguity of knowledge is revealed

as each group presents their truth statements and other groups raise questions about them or refute them. The idea is not to generate statements which are factually true but to identify issues for further research and exploration.

Start with a personal experience

Ask students to volunteer their personal experiences with a topic or to give their personal reaction to a case history, video etc. Students who are new to discussion may be reluctant to speak when they don't feel knowledgeable enough. However most people feel they are experts on their own lives. As students progress it may be useful to ask them what they thought and felt about the experience at the time and whether their underlying assumptions have now changed or they would interpret the situation differently now. A possible educational benefit is to help people see their stories from different perspectives and understand their experiences in new ways.

In the early life of a learning group, members may benefit from practising how to *listen* effectively, how to process the contribution of other members and in sharpening their own responses.

Briefing and debriefing practical, clinical or experiential learning

When **briefing** students before a practical, clinical or experiential learning session, you can ask students to think for a few moments and to make some notes for themselves as to what they hope to learn from the forthcoming experience and how they expect to learn. Then ask students to discuss and compare their expectations. Prompt students to think about how they might make the most of the experience – will they be doing all of their learning on the ward or should they be doing follow up reading? What kinds of contacts can they initiate for themselves? What is the protocol?

You might also explore their emotional readiness for the work ahead – how confident or anxious do they feel? Do they feel adequately prepared? Do they have the level of knowledge necessary for to-day's learning?

Remind students that in the debriefing later, what and how they learned will be discussed. If the experience is to extend over some time, it may be useful to ask students to keep a record of any 'critical incidents' – incidents that were significant learning experiences for them. These can provide rich material for discussion in the debriefing session.

If **debriefing** were simply a matter of checking what each student had learned there would be no point in meeting as a group. Each student has observed from an individual perspective. Getting the 'whole picture' is important and is not often possible without group discussion following clinical exposure.

Debriefing may be necessary during as well as after. An individual student, the group as a whole, or the tutor could initiate a debriefing session as a particular issue or patient problem emerges.

In a debriefing session you can:

Provide support by showing interest in students' problems, recognising concerns and acknowledging commendable performance, recognising difficulties, praising where due.

Provide opportunities for students to review their progress by assisting students to determine further learning activities in relation to their outcomes and encouraging students' to review their own progress.

Acknowledge partnership in learning by offering reviews of your own clinical or teaching performance.

Give feedback on students' performance by providing feedback requested by students in briefing sessions and using information from direct observation and by providing concrete examples and checking that the feedback is congruent with students' perception of performance.

Invite reflection on the events of the attachment by prompting students to go over what happened, what was surprising, different, frightening, satisfying, disappointing and so on ; encouraging expression of feelings about what happened during the attachment; inviting examples of new discoveries, new knowledge and/or insights as they applied their knowledge to patient's problems; prompting students to draw meanings from their personal experiences ; encouraging students to determine their own outcomes for further learning.

References

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4. Managing difficult groups/students; tips and pitfalls

Let's think first about the pitfalls as the tips cover some strategies to avoid these. Common pitfalls or likely problems of small groups have been grouped by Tiberius (1990) under the following headings:

Group goals; they are unclear, unattainable or unacceptable

Group interaction; it is lacking, teacher dominates, students participate unequally

Group motivation and emotion; students are tuned out, teacher is tuned out or students don't cooperate.

What is most useful in Tiberius' approach is that he identifies possible causes for each of these. Rather than apportion blame to the students, he lists other underlying factors that may be contributing. Even though his book is now 10 years old, his trouble-shooting guide is applicable in the small groups we have today and I strongly recommend you get a copy.

A very brief summary of some of his most useful points follow around the three areas referred to above:

- 1. Pitfall - Group goals;** they are unclear, unattainable or unacceptable
Possible causes:
failure to establish goals for the group; digression from goals; process not matched to goals; poor time management; teacher and students perceive goals differently
Suggestions:
set clear goals; establish goals for each session/meeting; make goals relevant to those of the students; agree on timeframe and remind students
- 2. Pitfall - Group interaction;** it is lacking, teacher dominates, students participate unequally
Possible causes:
lack of, or bad, experience with small group learning; students not rewarded for participation; low level of trust; teacher's authority is overwhelming; dominant speakers monopolise the discussion
Suggestions:
make clear what skills are needed for small group learning and explain the benefits; agree on a set on group or ground rules; reflect on both content and process of the group; encourage students to reward one another; reward students contributions by using them; remember who said what; talk less; provide opportunities for students to cooperate and trust one another; talk to the dominant student privately and/or assign a task to this student.

- 3. Pitfall - Group motivation and emotion;** students are tuned out, teacher is tuned out or students don't cooperate.

Possible causes:

little interest in topic; relevance of group process unclear; students are preoccupied with the exam; lack of institutional support for teaching; lack of feedback from students; students do not accept the assumption of the course; excessive competition among students; disruptive behaviour

Suggestions:

explore students' personal motivations to study topic; provide evidence topic is relevant or interesting; tap into students' experiences; review group rules if needed; address the exam agenda and define activity as useful to exam; support teaching and document teaching activities; reward excellence in teaching; ask for formative feedback from your students; don't let discussion of presuppositions replace the content; expose competitive behaviour; emphasise cooperative learning; break the group up into pairs or smaller groups; ask students to take different roles; if needed speak to any students privately.

Some other pitfalls you may encounter more specifically include

Pitfall 1: Students don't prepare

Ask the students why. Consider beginning the class by giving students short extracts to read or data to review so that all the class is familiar with the material they are to work on. If you think it is reasonable to get them to prepare ahead of time:

- emphasise the importance of preparation,
- consider calling off a class if you find that most students are not ready, in order to make your point, and
- *make sure to use what the students have prepared in the class.*

Students will quickly realise that whatever you say about the importance of preparation there is not much point in doing it if no one will notice.

Pitfall 2: Students don't participate or seem disengaged

This relates to Tiberius' motivation. Is it all the students or just some? If no one wants to participate consider whether past experiences (in this group or others) have made participation a risky business because of the likelihood of being criticised, embarrassed or humiliated for making a mistake. It may also be that the teacher or facilitator who had the group before dominated the discussions and they expect you to do the same.

Reiterate why you think small group work is important and (re)establish ground rules for discussion. (Try including 'No put downs'.)

Begin the session by breaking students into pairs or subgroups to work on a task. Have reporters report on the group opinion.

Start with a question that's easy to answer such as 'What has been your personal experience with.....?'

Pose a question and give students a few minutes to think about it and make some notes before calling on someone.

Refer to students' points in the discussion and when summarising (eg 'as Joe said.....') so that they know that you have been listening and that their contribution was valuable.

Pitfall 3: One person dominates

This relates to Tiberius' interaction. Thank the talkative person for their contribution and then invite others to speak. Interrupt them and invite other comments ('Before you go on, I would like to see if anyone else has an opinion on that')

Use structured participation, such as going around the group (each person speaks or passes.)

Break into subgroups. Ask the talkative person to be the scribe.

Rearrange the seating so that you are sitting beside the talkative person.

Refer to ground rules (if you made a rule about valuing wide participation.)

Speak to them privately. Explain that while you understand that they like to participate actively and that you appreciate their enthusiasm, you are concerned that their confidence and articulateness may inhibit others from participating. Ask them to hold back a bit so that you can encourage others to come in.

Pitfall 4: Students complain about how you run the group

Check what their goals are for the group. Is the problem that students do not see how the group work is contributing to their goals - which usually involve passing exams or other forms of assessment?

Explain why you do things and how what you do contributes to their goals (short term and long term professional goals). If it doesn't contribute, consider how it might and negotiate.

Ask for suggestions about how the group might be better run. Discuss with the group and negotiate alternative strategies.

Some useful tips when teaching a small group which can be used as a checklist include:

Tip 1: Be prepared

As we have already stated, good small group work rarely just happens. It relies to a great extent on preparation by the teacher and involves being clear about what the session is designed to achieve.

Tip 2: Make introductions and set ground rules

Introductions are important because it is difficult to have an open discussion with someone when you don't know anything about them, even their name. It is also a great opportunity for the group leader/facilitator to find out a little more about students' backgrounds with the topic. You may also wish to hear the students' previous experiences of tutorials, especially what worked well for them, and what didn't.

We have already covered the importance of negotiating and clarifying ground rules for discussion so that students know what the 'rules of the game' are. Of course if you are working with students who have already had extensive experience in small group work this need not be a lengthy process but it is probably still worth doing for the value it has in heading off later conflicts.

Tip 3: Use questioning effectively

Asking questions, considering the answer, knowing when to respond with a comment or explanation and when to use a follow up question or re-direct the question to someone else are key skills in keeping a discussion going and keeping students interested and involved.

Tip 4: Explain at the appropriate time

George Brown who wrote extensively about the art of lecturing and explaining, pointed out that when it comes to small group sessions, knowing *when* to explain was probably more important than knowing how to explain. Because the objective of small group teaching is to encourage students to think and discuss, it is unwise for the teacher to offer too much in the way of explanation too early. Students will quickly realise that all they have to do is remain silent and the teacher will provide all of the answers.

It is usually much better to provide any explanation needed after the students have made a good attempt at the task for the session. It may be a good idea to hold the explanation until you are summarising at the end of a task or the end of a session. At this point you can draw together the responses of the group, correct any misconceptions that may have arisen and

make use of the students' own contributions in any explanation that is given. Having their contributions recognised in this way rewards students for participating and builds up their confidence. It is likely to encourage them to contribute to future sessions (Brown and Atkins, 1988).

Tip 5: Summarise and Close

Summarising may be used at the end of an activity as well as at the end of a session to bring together the key points that have been made, the key understandings that have been arrived at and the unresolved questions that remain for further discussion or research.

If you are aiming for students to improve their teamwork and communication skills it may also be useful to summarise the processes that have been used, the stages that the group has gone through, for example, in problem solving, and the progress that has been made.

Summaries help to show students what is important in a topic and how that links to related topics. They are useful in helping students develop the 'well-structured knowledge base' that is the foundation for expertise. Good judgement is required in deciding what to highlight and what to omit.

You can also, of course, delegate the process of summarising to students, asking a couple of students to highlight the key points that have been made and someone else to identify important questions that remain unresolved.

Closing a session also involves other courtesies. Thanking the group for their contributions and pointing out what has been achieved is good for morale and helps to develop the cohesiveness of the group.

Tip 6: Evaluate your teaching

Ask your students how you are going. Ask a peer to come in and sit in on a session, using the Peer Review Checklist, see attached. Make use of the institutional evaluation processes, such as CATEI.

References

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