Objectives

• Identify the unique circumstances of small group teaching
• List and define the characteristics of an effective small group leader
• Techniques used in small group teaching
• Techniques to improve group interaction
• Ways to provide feedback to students
The Setting

- Small group of <15 students (e.g. Colleges)
- You are the leader
- Your task
  - Discuss a case
  - Present a topic
  - Review difficult concepts
  - Teach physical exam
What are some of the challenges involved in small group teaching?

- Getting the students involved
- Keeping them awake
- Keeping them interested
- Preventing everyone from going into asystole
- Teaching the information
- Make it fun!
What are students’ perceptions?

- Effective small group leader
  - Non threatening group atmosphere
  - Covered clinically relevant information
  - Integrates clinical information
  - Encourages independent thinking and problem solving

*Steinert, et al. Medical Education . 38(3). 2004*
What are students’ perceptions?

- Personal characteristics
  - Sense of humor
  - Easy going in promoting group interaction
  - Allows group to ask questions
  - Work as a team

*Steinert, et al. Medical Education. 38(3). 2004*
An Effective Small Group Teacher …

- Defines expectations
  - Tells the students up front how you are going to run things and what you expect
  - Goes over what s/he is looking for in grading (This can sometimes work against you)
  - Goes over what the objectives are at the beginning
An Effective Small Group Teacher …

- **Nurtures a safe group**
  - Declares “what is said in the group stays in the group”
  - Sets an example with his/her own behavior (important in Ethics discussions)
  - Is willing to share his/her own experiences, if appropriate
  - Steps in if the discussion crosses boundaries in your judgment
An Effective Small Group Teacher ...

- Manages time
  - Is punctual
  - Starts on time
  - DOESN’T go over the scheduled time
  - Watches students’ time if they are spending too long on a given subject
An Effective Small Group Teacher …

- Guides the discussion rather than steal the show
  - Involves the students in the discussion rather than giving the answer
  - Plays the devil’s advocate to promote independent discussion
  - Calls on individual students if no one volunteers information
  - If one student always talks, asks them to wait while others talk
  - Add humor
  - Interject personal experiences, when appropriate
How do you handle these situations?

- Constant talker
- Apathetic student
- Quiet student
- Offensive student
Constant Talker

- Student who constantly dominates
  - Frequently very observant
  - Want to be at the center of discussion
  - Gives their opinion first
- Suggestions
  - Ask them to “hold their horses” while giving others a chance
  - Set the rules at the beginning by calling other students first
  - Divide students into 2 groups if ethics case
Apathetic Student

• Can be very frustrating
• Student who is really not interested to be there
• Student may say “I don’t know” a lot
• Suggestions
  • Meet with them outside of the group first
  • Find out the reasons for their behavior
  • Lay down the law- you may have to fail them
Quiet student

• Student is interested but only speaks when spoken to
• Frequently very bright individuals
• Fear of speaking in public
• Suggestions
  • Meet with them outside of group
  • Call on them first sometimes to give answer
  • Have them lead a discussion
Offensive student

• Student who is very strong-willed
• Gives their opinion at all costs
• Looked at as insensitive
• Suggestions
  • Discuss with them after the small group session and go over their behavior pattern
  • It is probably best not to single them out in front of everyone but handle it one on one at the end
How to teach small groups

- **Lectures/mini-lectures**
  - Work well when emphasizing a topic but difficult to follow for a long time
  - Can put people to sleep if you are not dynamic
  - Remember that you may be teaching but students may not be learning
How to teach small groups

- Case discussions
  - Easy to teach basic concepts but sometimes difficult to emphasize more advanced topics
  - Limited to what the information that the case is about
    - There is only so much that one can teach
  - Sometimes difficult to involve the whole group if they have not researched the case
How to teach small groups

- Problem based learning
  - Allows one to teach difficult concepts revolving around a clinical problem
  - Sometimes hard to teach concepts outside the case that are important
  - You have to involve the group and be dynamic
How to teach small groups

- Role play
  - Have to be a good actor/actress to get the point across
  - The audience may not follow everything well
  - This only works for a short time to get the point across and can sometimes backfire on you
  - Some students really hate this method
Which is the best way?

- Probably a combination of many techniques
  - Problem based learning
  - Some role play
  - Some mini lectures
  - Some case discussion
- Example of ethics case
  - Lecture about some concepts
  - Bring in one of your own case experiences
  - Divide into groups and role-play
Feedback

• How can we give feedback to students?
  • Real-time
    • Tell student on the spot how they did in front of group
    • Can be effective but sometimes risky
  • Written
    • Send a written assessment to student at a later time
    • Gives concrete summative feedback with suggestions
  • Real-time group
    • Have entire group critique a person along with yourself
    • Allows everyone to learn from each other
Feedback

• What works best?
  • Probably a combination of real-time and written
  • Example: Student presents a patient that he/she saw in hospital
    • Ask group what did they think?
    • What did they do well?
    • What did they do not so well?
    • Give your impressions
    • Tips to improve
    • Grade the write-up and provide individual feedback in writing
Conclusion

- Small group teaching is very challenging
- Involves using all of your skills as a teacher
- Allows you to really connect individually with students
- Can use fun techniques of teaching not possible in other settings like lecture hall
- May be one of the best scenarios for educating students