

## EDITORIAL

## TOOLKIT FOR LEARNING

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Amongst culturally and educationally diverse student populations, the small group tutorial fosters integration socialization and strive to implement an approach to teaching based upon a fundamental commitment to student engagement and active learning.<sup>1</sup> Consistent with Vygotsky views that social interaction with teachers and other learners play a fundamental role in the development of understanding.<sup>2</sup> These sessions are learner centred and based upon constructivist approach utilizing many principles of adult learning.<sup>3-5</sup> Students' management of their own learning during the sessions, is helpful in achieving the goal of producing self-directed, life-long and active learners.<sup>6</sup> By encouraging vertical and horizontal integration, these sessions provided opportunities for knowledge application and contextual learning.<sup>7</sup> Social interactions and a collaborative rather than competitive environment encourages teamwork and improves communication skills leading to better working relationships.<sup>8</sup>

These sessions enable learners to clarify their own understanding, build upon each other's contributions, lift out meanings, ask and answer questions under zone of proximal development.<sup>9</sup> The aim of teaching from a constructivist perspective is not so much as to transmit information but as to encourage knowledge formation and metacognition process and acquisition of new information. Teacher can check on what students are retaining through questions. However, when asking those questions in response to theirs, they can be lead along a line of thought where they work through the answer themselves, with some assistance in trajectory and thought provoking. By not spoon-feeding them responses, they develop the tools to work through a general problem and not simply how to memorize answers.<sup>10</sup>

Small group teaching with mixed levels of learners also offers the opportunity to set expectations of learners at all levels and demonstrate expectations for progressive competence in the continuum of medical education. Auditory learners find small group discussions appealing to their learning style. Small group learning develops the skill of giving and handling feedback.<sup>10</sup> It places facilitator in a position to identify the relative strengths and weakness of

students and thus to give attention and relevant support to the weak students.

The small size of the group encourages open discussion in affable and supportive climate. Large-group instruction in a multi-level setting is typically geared to the 'middle level' with the result that more advanced students may not be challenged, while less advanced students are left confused. Small group encourages students towards self direction through scaffolding leading to independent learning. Learning in small groups allows students to discover and engage with a range of perspectives ideas and backgrounds. Teaching in this setting helps to identify and acknowledge the different levels of students to ensure that all learners are included in the learning process. In small group students have a tendency to stay focused on the lesson because they might be called on to answer questions. While in whole-class instruction may make it harder for the instructor to perceive how individual students are learning, and students who are hesitant to ask for assistance may be overlooked.<sup>11</sup>

Small group teaching sessions are the best methods since these involve learner's participation, interaction, task achievement, reflection, improvement of interpersonal and communication skills, presentation skills, attitude of tolerance, and responsibility of their own learning. The ideal group size should be less than 20 so that everybody will have a chance to participate in the discussion. Effective discussion requires communication, which is not only verbal but also non-verbal involving, for example, gestures, facial expressions, eye contacts and postures.<sup>12</sup>

The impact on small group dynamics during future case-base sessions should be implemented for incorporating appropriate behaviour in students and team-building in the curriculum at institutional level.

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