

Medical Education Interest Group Newsletter

Facilitating Discussions in an Online Environment

October, 2020



Notes from Meeting

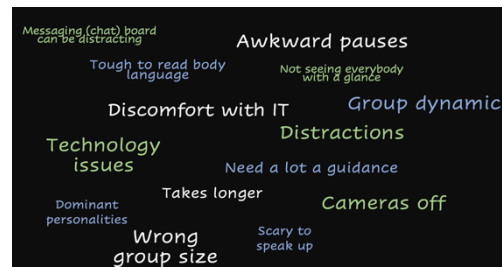


Thank you to all of those who came to our Inaugural 2020-21 Medical Education Interest Group meeting! This month we welcomed Dr Debbi Marais who talked to us about facilitating discussions in an online environment. She helped us to gain clarity on the things that work well, the challenges that this environment poses, and how we can best navigate the online classroom in effective ways. Our session began with a lively discussion about **WHY** discussion is such an important element in the online learning environment, and members were quick to respond, pointing out that:

1. It makes things more enjoyable, interactive and memorable
2. It helps learners to uncover their strengths, weaknesses, and areas of misconception
3. Reduces cognitive loading by encouraging students to verbalize their thoughts, hypothesize and explore ideas
4. Helps students to develop confidence and a voice
5. Helps to build an environment of learning that feels more like a community

Once our discussion about discussion concluded, Debbi explained that you must be proactive and intentional in the way that you set up and plan your online discussions. This is necessary in order for the discussion to be **effective, inclusive and memorable**. She went on to give us **5 TIPS** to optimize the discussion's outcomes (Howe et al., 2019): 1) Pose open questions; 2) Encourage extended student contributions with justifications (versus the dreaded one word answers); 3) Be ready to probe and critique contributions; 4) Look for ways to link contributions from participants to other discussion points or learning activities; and 5) Keep in mind the end goal of why you are asking for a discussion in the first place (remember those things which make discussion so important!).

Debbi continued the session by having us discuss the major challenges we've faced as teachers, and as students, when it comes to online discussions - many things emerged that the majority could sympathize with (see image).



Next, the discussion turned to how we can mitigate online discussion challenges – specifically, the things we can do before the session even starts, things we can do during the session, and things we can do after the session concludes:

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give students pre-work, with structured questions to think about prior to session• Set clear ground rules• Play music as the start• Pair students up in the buddy system (ask one to be leader)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have an enthusiastic facilitator• Use an ice-breaker activity• Ask students to actively take notes and share their screens for important points• Utilize tools: e.g. Vevox, polling, break-out rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Link discussion results to other learning activities• Have students write a reflection piece on their experiences in the discussion

Overall, Debbi's session helped us consciously consider one aspect of our online lives - offering all who attended many practical tips to make that next online discussion even better!

Upcoming Events

Next meeting:

Tuesday, Dec 1st, 2020

1200 – MS Teams

Dr Emily Unwin

Topic: TBC

Quote of the Month:

*It can be challenging to...
"Find the balance of building trust and relationships with students whilst also getting through the breadth and depth of teaching and learning activities allocated to a specific time limited session."*

-Anonymous

Research Article Spotlight:

[Teacher-Student Dialogue During Classroom Teaching: Does It Really Impact on Student Outcomes?](#)

Howe et al. (2019), *Journal of Learning Sciences*, 28:4-5.