Case-based Comparative Learning (CBCL) in Action
Managing effective in-class CBCL sessions
Barbara Cockrill
HMS Academy

BEFORE STARTING, OBSERVE A CBCL SESSION!

Session II: Managing effective in-class CBCL sessions—This handout will focus on the mechanics of running an in-class CBCL session

- Faculty preparation is essential
  - Read all prep material
    - This is crucial. You need to know the approach to the material that students have learned.
  - Review readiness assessment exercises
  - If you are co-teaching, meet with your teaching partner ahead of time to go over the plan (see document on co-teaching)
  - Visit the room,
    - Make sure you know how to use the technology.

- In-class exercises
  - Introduce yourself! Write your name and email on the board.
  - General plan:
    - Faculty orients students to plan
    - Students discuss questions/cases at tables
    - Faculty circulate
    - Faculty-facilitated group discussion.
  - Set up the learning plan for the session, and let students know that you will make sure that the plan is fulfilled.
    - Consider writing the general time plan on the board—this shares the burden of keeping the session on time between faculty and students.
    - The “plan” will likely depend on the content of the session, and where the students are in the course/year. For most sessions, you will want to “get through” all of the material. If the content is problems sets, for example multiple ECGs or blood gases to interpret, you need not get through everything.
    - Move the discussion along if necessary. Offer a time to go over a question with students after the session.

- Running the session:
  - Each course or content area should have a general agreement on how a session will be run. Decide on the following:
    - Discussion point for faculty from different courses: Do you keep students in the same groups or reassign students? daily? Weekly?
      - In the Foundations course (which is comprised of 5 different content areas) students were assigned to groups according to
subject matter. This allows for different groupings of students, and worked very well.

- We strongly recommend AGAINST allowing students to choose their own spots each day.

  - **Discussion point:** strategy for student input.
    - Call on volunteers
    - Call on a table
    - Future courses may consider assigning a spokesperson for each table each day
      - Encourages the quiet student to speak up
      - Thwarts the very vocal student from monopolizing the sessions.
    - We generally recommend against “Cold” calling individuals unless this has been discussed between faculty and students.

- Students are sitting at tables of 4
  - Each table discusses a question/case
  - Faculty circulate—
    - some students may want to ask questions, but the experience so far is that students work in their groups without asking for much help.
    - “How’s your group doing?”
    - “Any sticking points?”
    - Keep an ear out for themes (correct and incorrect avenues of thinking); as discussion ensues you may say, “heard some groups say ___”
    - Also try to be aware of the effect of your listening on the group
      - Is it perceived as eaves dropping?
      - Does it thwart conversation?
      - We worried about this at the beginning of the year, but the experience so far is that students are not inhibited by faculty circulating.

- Faculty focuses the class for a group discussion
  - Ask students to explain the question/case
    - So far, asking for and calling on volunteers has worked best.
    - Call on groups identified during the table discussions (“table 3, I heard you bring up an interesting point on this issue; tell the class what you were thinking...” etc.)
    - Ask, “What did your GROUP think?” (rather than “What did YOU think?”) Asking about the group may help the student feel less “put on the spot.”
    - Feedback from students is that a “cold call” on an individual is perceived very negatively, and is not productive.
    - Asking questions
      - “How,” and “why,” and “tell me how you think about this” rather than “what” questions
Stay with student until they say something correct; simplify question, give hints, reduce question to component parts if they are struggling

Important for faculty NOT to allow a session to bog down due to a small number of students who are confused.

- Student feedback has generally indicated that less time on a topic, with assurance that the issue will be explained, is much better than spending too much time on an unproductive discussion.
- “I know there are still some questions on this, but we need to move on. I’ll be available for anyone who isn’t clear....”

Also important not to bog down b/c YOU are having trouble explaining something.

- Use your co-leader to help
- Ask students to help, “Can anyone explain this better than I am?”
- Agree to come back to it “Let me think about how I can explain this better, and I’ll talk about it in the next session (or make concept video, etc.”

Teaching “behaviors”

- Restate and summarize as the session evolves.
- Think about where you stand. Make sure to engage the whole room.
- The podium can be used to engage the group.
- Use body language to encourage (or discourage) a student’s participate
- Monitor yourself and co-teacher for non-facilitating teaching behavior
  - Lack of wait time
  - Rapid reward
  - Pre-programmed answer