Dr Maria C Mosquera



Dr Maria C Mosquera Talks About Using Breakout Rooms With Large Numbers Of Medical Students For Hybrid Classes

The sound of silence … You've just asked a question to a large group of students and the seconds tick by, yet there is no response. Or, you have the same handful of students who graciously participate and respond to all your questions. This issue seems to arise not only with large in-person classes but also in our current era of online or hybrid classes. Utilizing the chat box, creating polls, using quizzing platforms, and allowing students to "raise" their hand or vote are all ways to try to engage those students who are not in the same room as you.

But when you have a large group of 100-plus students and only a select few are engaging, what more can you do to try to increase the amount of interaction and foster collective learning? The breakout sessions feature in WebEx creates an opportunity as it allows students to interact in small groups online. We have utilized breakout sessions in a variety of medical school classes and more recently to discuss Public Health Ethics, stakeholders in a COVID-19 public health exercise, and to conduct an outbreak investigation. Students were divided into small groups, each answering a question. Then, all came back together in the larger session where a 'presenter' from each small group shared with the class their group's response, after which the class discussed the response as a whole, with facilitation by the tutor or expansion upon topics as needed. Each of these sessions, by the nature of their design, resulted in increased interaction and collective sharing.

Lessons learned include:

1) It is easier to use WebEx Meetings for Breakout Sessions instead of WebEx Training.

2) This takes time and patience on the parts of both the students and the tutors. In addition, it is important to set some ground rules, explaining to students beforehand what to expect.

3) For time management, it is better to have a realistic idea of the amount of work students can tackle, as inevitably discussions will take longer than expected, particularly if technical difficulties are encountered.

Some challenges remain, as technology doesn't always cooperate. And complexities are further enhanced when in a large "hybrid" class, where some students are in-person but the rest are online. In hybrid scenarios, technical difficulties may differentially impact those online.

However, breakout sessions may allow for increased engagement and collective learning and they additionally create an opportunity for the creation of interactions between groups of students at varied locations. We are looking forward in the near future to exploring this feature for Interprofessional Education to create ways in which large groups of students from varied parts of the multidisciplinary health care team (e.g., medical, pharmacy, and nursing students, etc.) can interact in order to learn together how to become effective and collaborative members of the multidisciplinary team.

If you would like to collaborate in the development of IPL activities, please contact Dr Maria Cecilia Mosquera, IPL Academic Coordinator at cecilia.m@unic.ac.cy.