

FACILITATION SKILLS

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The instructor's ability to properly facilitate team learning in small or large classroom settings is essential to the overall success of the TBL session. One of the key things that sets TBL apart from other active-learning strategies is that 1 course instructor can facilitate a session, regardless of class size.^{1,2} The instructor will have multiple responsibilities throughout the session to ensure the learning process is occurring through intra- and inter-team discussion. The most important skill for the facilitator is the ability to encourage teams to verbalize their rationales during large group discussions to achieve the predetermined learning objectives.³ The facilitator's role is to serve as the content expert for the focused discussions that will follow the RAT and team application exercises and also to provide a framework for the implementation of the session.⁴ The framework for implementation can be broken into 3 components: social, administrative or organizational, and intellectual or knowledge base.⁵ Having a solid framework will help to ensure that student engagement is properly managed. The components of the framework often overlap and each will be briefly described below.

The facilitator will need to create and maintain an open and interactive environment in which teams feel safe and comfortable interacting with one another. To accomplish this goal, the facilitator's responsibilities include: setting the tone for the session, encouraging interactivity, inviting responses from teams, asking probing questions when necessary, and acknowledging the individual contributions made by the teams.⁵

The administrative or organizational role of the facilitator is to establish the rules for the session, keep discussions focused on meeting the learning objectives, monitor the discussions by walking around the room during the TBL session, and invite participation from teams who do not appear to be actively engaged in the discussion.⁵ Providing students with an outline of the timing of each component of TBL (individual and team RAT, team application exercises, etc) will assist in keeping the TBL session moving towards completion.

Unlike other learning strategies where facilitators provide learners with feedback and guidance regarding their reasoning but are not necessarily content experts, instructors who serve as facilitators for TBL activities are expected to be content-experts for their respective sessions, able to anticipate and address learner's questions and misconceptions as they arise during the session.⁴ Using the "backward design" and starting with the end in mind, the intellectual role of the facilitator is to assist team members in achieving predetermined learning objectives.^{4,5} The intellectual responsibilities of the facilitator are to stimulate student thinking by phrasing appropriate questions, make connections to objectives and practical application when necessary, provide informative feedback, and summarize key points.⁵ Proper facilitation of the focused discussion that occurs upon spontaneous reporting following the team RAT or team application exercises requires the instructor to have a thorough understanding of the learning objectives outlined for the students.

There are 2 main points of discussion that occur in a TBL session: (1) at the conclusion of the RAT process and (2) during inter-team discussions of the team application exercises. Immediate feedback provides students the opportunity for engagement with both course content and their peers.² The intra-team discussion benefits students who have misinterpreted course materials by

helping them understand their misconceptions prior to consolidation into long term memory.³ Prior to moving on to the application exercises, the facilitator should gauge the entire classes' understanding of the core concepts that were assessed during the readiness assurance process. The facilitator can provide additional insight on content, but only after all teams have had the opportunity to explain their thinking.

Once a conceptually based, challenging, relevant team application exercise is constructed, the time allowed to complete a case varies. The original model suggests 8 minutes for intra-team discussion followed by a brief inter-team discussion.¹ The time to complete the team application exercise can be dictated by the number of questions within each case but can range from 3 to 15 minutes.^{6,7} Many practitioners of TBL use cases with 3 to 5 multiple-choice questions.^{7,8} The time for inter-team discussion can vary from 8 to 30 minutes depending on the complexity of the case, thoroughness of discussion, or allowing a "time for telling" for areas where there is a lack of knowledge.⁷ In one study, the time to complete a case was pared down throughout the semester to eventually reach a 5-minute time point, a time period typically encountered with patient counseling.⁹ Tan and colleagues used 3 minutes for groups to work on team application exercises.¹⁰ Parmelee and colleagues found students feel the time limit for team application exercises should not be longer than 2.5 hours and the instructor's role is to keep the discussion moving along.⁴

Specific techniques to promote inter-team discussions are described in the literature.³ The Table below lists useful facilitator techniques. Simultaneous reporting of answers provides a foundation for productive discussion because this is the first opportunity for students to see how their thinking contrasts with that of other teams.³ Each instructor will develop his/her own style for facilitating the TBL session. However, it is important to maintain some consistent procedures in the classroom. For example, instructors may be asked to provide a summary of all discussion points at the end of the inter-team discussion to assist students with identifying key concepts. For instructors who have not previously taught using TBL, in-class observation can assist them with identifying successful facilitation strategies.

Techniques to encourage students to speak loudly ¹	<p>Move away from the student who is talking.</p> <p>Ask the student to stand while talking.</p> <p>Ask the student to speak to their peers as opposed to speaking to the faculty instructor.</p>
Techniques to get the attention of a large group	<p>When the case is started, tell students how long they have to work on the case (eg, 8 minutes). Then at the half way mark, give them a time warning (eg, 4 minutes left). Then when 1 minute left, give another time warning. At the end of the time limit, ask "who needs more time, please raise your hand". If a team raises their hand, say "take 1 more minute". Otherwise you have their attention and can get started.</p>
Items to stimulate discussion ¹	<p><i>Give me one reason why you chose your answer.</i></p> <p><i>Does anyone have a different reason in support of or in opposition to the same answer?</i></p> <p><i>What was your second option?</i></p> <p><i>I'd like to get opinions from those who haven't talked for a while.</i></p> <p><i>What would you change to make this answer correct?</i></p> <p><i>Why didn't you choose answer choice (list the number/letter of a multiple choice answer that no teams selected)?</i></p> <p><i>What answers beyond those provided did your group discuss?</i></p>
Wrapping up the discussion	<p><i>Who else has an opinion on this issue?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any other issues that need to be discussed?</i></p> <p>The instructor should summarize the key discussion points and provide his/her rationale/thinking about the case.</p>

References

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