

EPA Thinking – Getting Started Guide

Overview

This “Getting Started Guide” is organized to facilitate teaching of EPA Thinking in a small group, flipped-classroom (FC) setting. This guide covers the general features of group learning:

- The EPA Thinking goal
- General learning objectives
- Success factors
- Group observation form
- First steps to take to administrate the course

EPA Thinking Goal:

The overall goal of this course is for students to develop entrustable thinking applied to their own clinical behavior. What is not immediately obvious is that this same thinking is the underpinning for self-directed, self-regulated learning. Thus, EPA Thinking is skill-acquisition thinking. The guidelines and principles set out here achieve this end through guided group self-reflection.

- The guidance is provided by a set of general questions accompanied by additional EPA specific questions.
- The dialogue will consist of students sharing their own perceptions of themselves as learners (and performers) through comparison of their present practice and entrustable practice.
- It will become clear that acquisition of EPA Thinking skills indicates that competency in each EPA behavior has been achieved.
- Further, the EPA Thinking course also prepares the student to continue acquisition of additional thinking skills in residency.

General Learning Objectives:

1. Individual students will be able to identify and verbalize their own strengths and deficiencies in their thinking.
2. Individual students will be able to progressively correlate their own habits of learning with the entrustable thinking that is going to be expected of them.
3. Individual students will be able to explain the purpose of each EPA in health care practice.
4. Flipped classroom groups will be able to reach consensus on acceptable rationales.
5. Flipped classroom groups will be able to extend thinking beyond the immediate descriptions and examples by integrating related topics.

Success factors:

- It is helpful for groups to be as heterogeneous as possible, e.g. undergraduate major, learning style, level of education, etc.
- Group composition should remain constant for at least the academic year for best cohesion.
 - a) Research on TBL shows that group cohesion takes at least two meetings.

- b) Be patient because it's really beautiful when cohesion develops.
- Much of the explanation for the development of cohesion rests on the shift from a subjective to an objective mentality.
 - a) Initially, the students will be in more of a subjective mode as they determine their role and their level of trust. People are more protective and less disclosing in an unknown setting, and regardless of outward appearances, most people are concerned about their value, i.e. are they OK?
 - b) The nature of the early discussions is designed to bring each student to the awareness that they are, indeed, OK. Equally important, they discover that the others are also OK in their own way.
 - Self-acceptance allows for discussions that involve their thinking to be viewed more objectively because they no longer need to be on guard.
 - Another type of subjectivity will develop, but it will only enhance the conversation. It's called enthusiasm.
- Rotation of responsibility for answering assigned questions helps to assure preparation; it is also needed to engage the introverts who speak best as responders rather than initiators.
 - a) Mentors will quickly learn that the most difficult part of the job is letting the students speak.
 - b) The next most difficult part is helping the group come to consensus, or guiding them to it by asking, "so do we agree...?"
- Stay on the alert for opinions; follow with "can you explain your thinking?"
 - a) The brain is designed to save energy at every point in the day and opinions are one way to do this.
 - b) Opinions are a type of automated behavior that serves many activities, but they degrade skilled thinking.
 - c) Opinions, even from experts, are bad for the speaker because they lead to lazy, automated thinking and they are bad for the listener because they provide incomplete information.
- The most important opposites in thinking are the Jungian sensing and intuitive preferences. Either preference can give a misleading impression of EPA Thinking.
 - a) Sensing types can demonstrate a command of details and facts.
 - b) Intuitive types can demonstrate insight into alternatives and integration.
 - c) Neither type is sufficient on its own; both must be developed in EPA Thinking.

Group Observation form:

An EPA Thinking observation form is available at the website in a document file to facilitate modification for local needs and interests. Use of this form by the mentor, or a separate observer, allows for monitoring progress and can provide data to include in a publication of this method. The data address several different aspects of the flipped-classroom that contribute to higher order thinking:

- 1) Degree of engagement: Rather than measure the behavior of individuals, engagement measures the amount of interchange. Interchange is essential for sensing types and

intuitive types to hear each other's thinking. This is one of the fastest ways for students to upgrade their thinking. Engagement also increases the emotional component of the dialogue thus facilitating the consolidation of learning during sleep. Introverts develop speaking skills and extraverts develop listening skills when engagement is well developed.

- 2) Depth of integration: Students are initially inclined to provide simple answers comparable to those found on course exams. However, they will learn to answer "beyond" the question as their awareness of the integration needed improves.
- 3) Microlectures: It is inevitable that topics will arise where the mentor has some relevant experience. This will be unplanned, but it will provide extra "value added" to the dialogue. Its fullest expression is during attending rounds when the attending physician contributes relevant guidance to bring closure to a patient workup. These brief interruptions will usually only take 5 minutes or less and care must be taken to avoid distraction from the topic at hand.
- 4) Comments: Any activity involving people will have its unplanned, unpredictable events and if a mentor sees some significance, the comments box is the place to record it. They can be formative suggestions for the FC process or for identifying problems.

First steps with curriculum issues:

Step 1. Download the syllabus and familiarize yourself with the conduct of the flipped classroom. Review the first module to get a feel for the nature of the dialogue.

Step 2. Check the SuccessTypes website homepage for the Expert Skills Program for an introduction. This information is referred to throughout the modules.

Step 3. Convene a small "drafting committee" to prepare a proposal to submit to your curriculum committee. (A sample starter proposal is available at the website as a document file for easy adaptation to your curriculum.) Curriculum committees respond best to proposals that have already been vetted by a group as opposed to those from individuals.

Step 4. Consult with your curriculum committee for approval of your proposal to offer the EPA Thinking Course.

- Consider giving elective credit so it will show up on the transcript for residency application.
- Let the students know that it will help their residency application.
- Let the admissions office know that they can advertise that your school helps improve competitive advantage for residency.

Step 5. Hold an initial meeting-of-the-whole with the prospective mentors to discuss the conduct of the flipped classroom.

- a) Remind the mentors that they do not present material but rather they guide discussion, i.e. "*guide on the side.*"
- b) If you are already conducting TBL modules in your curriculum, the GRAT and application exercise can serve as a good model for guiding flipped classroom dialogue.
- c) One week prior to each EPA Thinking session, post links to the modules for the students and mentors to access.
- d) Discuss the need for group cohesion.
 - Research on TBL shows that group cohesion takes at least two meetings.
 - Be patient because it's really beautiful after that.

- e) Encourage use of the observation rubric to assess both engagement and integration.
 - The printable document file will allow for local customization.
 - Contact me to discuss how you might use this data in presenting posters.

Step 7. Develop your own system for attendance and monitor for problems.

- a) For excused absences, make-up work could include written answers to each question.

Step 8. Let me know of additions that would make this guide easier to use.