

Title: Evaluation techniques of teaching: focus groups and the Nominal Group Technique

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Familiar with the Nominal Group Technique and its stages.
- Aware of the benefits and potential challenges of using the Nominal Group Technique.
- Contrast two different evaluation techniques for the purpose of evaluating teaching and learning experiences (focus group and Nominal Group Technique).
- Consider a combination the focus group with Nominal Group Technique and analyse this combined technique with regards to benefits and challenges in evaluating teaching and learning experiences.
- Adapt a suitable evaluation technique to suit their own context.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

The workshop will examine alternative approaches to teaching evaluation, which involves the identification of students' own issues and action planning with regards to teaching enhancement. One problem with student evaluation surveys is that the issues included are prescribed by those involved in creating the survey (Lomax and McLeman 1984, Chapple and Murphy 1996, Dobbie et al 2004, Lloyd-Jones et al 1999), rather than allowing students to raise their own concerns. Focus groups are one technique at the hand of researchers to gather learning experiences of students. In this workshop, another technique, the Nominal Group Technique (Delbecq et al 1975) is introduced through a direct experience of workshop participants. The Nominal Group Technique facilitates group consensus through equal participation and is a technique that can generate a high volume of ideas and solutions, making it an efficient process. Based on current work conducted with student groups at the University of Liverpool for the purpose of curriculum review in a range of programmes numerous benefits (O'Neil and Jackson 1983; Williams 2006) of this approach have been confirmed. Students engage with this evaluation significantly more than with surveys, they have a great sense and satisfaction taking an active part in the process. Efficiency of the method is another great benefit as the results of student views are available directly after each session, without the need for transcription. A central feature of this kind of evaluation is that it combines the quantitative with qualitative, making it appealing to commissioners of the research who, as opposed to the traditional focus group report, may favour a quantitative

approach. The session will also discuss challenges of this approach, as well as introducing participants to a combined focus group/nominal group as an alternative evaluation technique arising from recent research findings (Varga-Atkins *et al* 2011a,b).

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Session structure:

1. Introduction to the session / purpose. (10mins)
2. Demonstration of the Nominal Group Technique with the involvement of workshop participants. (25 mins)
3. Reflections on the experience in own context. (10 mins)
4. Group discussion of benefits & disadvantages of the technique with regards to evaluating learning experiences. (15 mins)
5. A revised approach: a combination of the nominal group and focus group techniques, followed by a discussion. (20 mins)
6. Action planning and closure. (10 mins)

References

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