

# Enhancing Student Engagement in the 10-Minute Breakout Activity: Pre-assigning Groups and Roles

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*Pre-assigning breakout groups and student roles for 10-minute breakout activities during live sessions is a practice that supports time management and diversification of student roles and responsibilities. Students report that a 10-minute breakout activity often feels like a short amount of time and this tool helps maximize the time for activity engagement. It also ensures that all students share breakout group role responsibilities throughout the semester. In an effort to honor trauma-informed practices, instructional teams send an announcement with pre-assignments prior to the live session so that students can prepare accordingly*

## Teaching and Learning Goal

that this tool aligns with several teaching and learning goals:

- Support time management
- Enhance student engagement
- Diversify student roles, responsibilities, and skill-building
- Strengthen community-building

## Activity and Results

### The challenge

Breakout activities are a time to reflect on course material, connect with colleagues, and practice professional skills. Prior to using the practice described in this chapter, we noticed that students spent a significant amount of time during the breakout activity deciding who would take on which role. Oftentimes, when there were long periods of silence in the decision-making process about student roles in breakout activities, the students who were more likely to take on leadership roles would lean into taking on the presenter or scribe role in an effort to model leadership and/or progress the activity. This tendency created a trend where the same students were the presenters and/or scribes throughout the semester and the students who were less likely to speak up in the decision-making process around role responsibility did not have the opportunity to practice presentation, documentation, and reflection skills. Consistent feedback from instructional team members and students highlighted that the 10 minutes dedicated to the breakout activity were therefore not well-utilized. We even found that some students would use their “away” icon and not engage in the assigned activity at all. The practice described in this chapter was created out of a desire to support time management as well as to diversify and enhance student engagement and responsibility.

### The solution

Pre-assigning students to specific breakout groups, rather than using the random breakout assignment function in Adobe Connect, allows for the instructional teams to have autonomy around enhancing community-building as well as meeting any specific student needs. Intentionally creating new breakout groups emphasizes diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. As the semester progresses, we are able to balance the groups to meet student dynamics and connect students in a meaningful way to positively leverage skills.

The CSSW Online Campus Faculty Development Series ([Levine et al, 2021](#)) introduced us to the roles “presenter,” “scribe,” and “facilitator.” The presenter represents many voices and is the person who shares highlights from the breakout group to the full class group. The student in the “scribe” role takes notes from the discussion during the breakout. The “facilitator” helps to manage time and ensure that all voices have time to share and are heard. Over the course of several semesters, we invited students to brainstorm a fourth role for pre-assignment because our breakout groups often have at least 4 students. They developed the “summarizer” role. The person in this role summarizes the discussion and supports the scribe in capturing the important highlights for the presenter to share out in the larger group.

Pre-assigning students to the presenter, scribe, facilitator, and summarizer roles positively impacts the efficiency and efficacy of the 10-minute breakout activity. Students better manage time to prioritize engaging in the material with one another and they are afforded opportunities to practice a diverse range of professional skills. It enables students who are more comfortable taking a less public role to take more public-facing roles and vice versa. Students who are concerned or uncomfortable with their pre-assigned role can receive positive recognition and support from peers. For example, students consistently offer words of support and praise in the chat during report-backs. This provides validation and positive reinforcement. Ensuring that all students participate in each role highlights that each role is valuable. Presenter, scribe, facilitator, and summarizer each require their own set of unique skills, not only in mastery of the subject matter but in group work, as well. There is more quality time spent on students engaging with one another, reflecting on course material, and returning to the larger group with insightful highlights.

## Recommendations

Per student feedback, we recommend informing students of the pre-assigned roles for the upcoming session’s breakout rooms prior to class. Sending an announcement to the class in Canvas is an easy way to do this. Trauma-informed efforts are essential, and giving students a heads up about what to expect helps minimize unexpected stressors.

The Live Support Specialist, or LSS, is a dedicated technical support specialist who handles technological challenges for synchronous social work classes and provides a seamless transition between technical planning and implementation in live sessions ([Báez et al, 2019](#)). We recommend that the LSS keep a spreadsheet of the group assignments and the pre-assigned roles so that they can track diversifying the groups and student roles from one breakout activity to the next throughout the semester (**Image 1**). Updating the spreadsheet does require thoughtful attention to recognizing and responding to student and class needs. It is helpful to have all breakout group information for the upcoming week in the presenter notes area of the Adobe Connect room for quick access and reference (**Image 7**). This allows the instructional team to edit pre-assigned roles as needed in the event of student absences.

## Technical Details and Steps

**Step 1:** Create a spreadsheet with all student names and pre-assign groups depending on the number of students needed in each group (**Image 1**).

**Step 2:** Continue to pre-assign student roles from one breakout activity/live session to the next. This needs consistent updating (**Image 1**).

- Create the spreadsheet to diversify groups from one activity/session to the next and diversify pre-assigned roles so that students have an opportunity to participate in different roles in each activity.
- Rotating students is important in that everyone gets a chance to discuss and engage with one another. After completing week 1, give each student a new role for week 2 while also placing them with two new students they were not with in week 1.
- If the instructor requests that the groups remain the same from one activity to the next or throughout the semester in its entirety, you can still diversify pre-assigned roles within the groups.
- If the student you pre-assigned to be the presenter role for a certain group was unexpectedly absent or unable to perform their role, the LSS can easily edit the pre-assigned roles and move the student from facilitator or summarizer into the presenter or scribe role.

**Step 3:** Prior to class, while in the Adobe Connect classroom, create a breakout template layout and use it to create a demo of the breakout rooms. This could include a chat pod, notepad, video, and a share slide that includes a breakout activity prompt. The slide uploaded here will automatically be present in all breakout groups if rooms are created while in this layout (**Image 2**).

**Step 4:** After creating the breakout template layout, create the desired number of breakout rooms in the breakout view mode and click “start breakout” which should automatically duplicate the breakout template made earlier (**Image 3**).

**Step 5:** While in the breakout mode, enter each breakout room to further customize them prior to class. Set up each breakout room’s notepad with the following pre-assigned roles from the spreadsheet:

- Presenter: Student A
- Scribe: Student B
- Facilitator: Student C
- Summarizer: Student D (**Images 4 and 5**)

**Step 6:** During the live class session, manually move attendees into pre-assigned groups after all students have arrived. Placing students in their groups by using the attendees pod ahead of time ensures a smooth transition into the activity once the “Start Breakouts” button is clicked (**Image 6**).

**Step 7:** During the live session, if any students with pre-assigned roles are missing, the LSS can start breakout mode during class while only moving themselves through the rooms to edit the pre-assigned roles. If a student is absent shortly before breakouts and there is not enough time to edit the breakout notepad, the LSS can enter the breakout group during the live session and re-assign the missing role. I recommend keeping the list of students who will be in each breakout group in the Presenter notes section (**Images 7 and 8**).

**Step 8:** Breakouts begin and the Instructor and Live Support Specialist can observe the groups’ notes in real time through the Bird’s-Eye View Layout (**Image 9**).

**Image 1:** Spreadsheet of Pre-Assigned Groups & Roles. To keep this chapter’s screengrabs simple while illustrating the practice of pre-assigning students to groups, we have created the images using only 8 students. The three visible names are the authors’ names.

**Image 1 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of a spreadsheet with six tables labeled Week 1 - Week 6 respectively. Each table includes two breakout groups with 4 students each, and each student has a pre-assigned role. Pre-assigned roles are “Presenter” in red font, “Scribe” in blue font, “Facilitator” in green font, and “Summarizer” in purple font. The different colors are used to help distinguish one role from the other and make it easier to recall who has already been in that role in the past. This image illustrates the names cycling through different roles and different groups each week. For example, “Sabeen” has already been the Facilitator (green text) in Week 1/Group 1, the Scribe (blue text) in Week 2/Group 1, and the Summarizer (purple text) in Week 3/Group 2, so they are assigned the Presenter (red text) role in Group 1 for the Week 4 class.

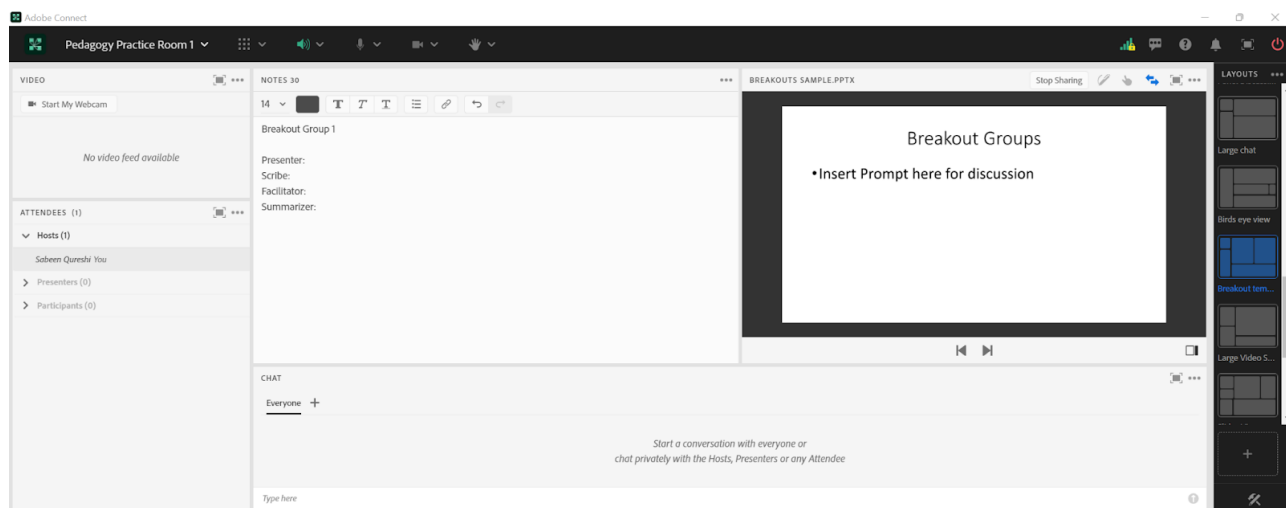
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>		<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>		<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>
2	Breakout Group 1	Bonnie Glass	Presenter		Breakout Group 1	Student 7	Presenter		Breakout Group 1	Edy Kupietzky	Presenter
3		Edy Kupietzky	Scribe			Student 4	Scribe			Student 6	Scribe
4		Sabeen Qureshi	Facilitator			Edy Kupietzky	Facilitator			Sabeen Qureshi	Facilitator
5		Student 4	Summarizer			Bonnie Glass	Summarizer			Student 7	Summarizer
6											
7	Breakout Group 2	Student 5	Presenter		Breakout Group 2	Student 6	Presenter		Breakout Group 2	Student 5	Presenter
8		Student 6	Scribe			Student 5	Scribe			Student 4	Scribe
9		Student 7	Facilitator			Student 8	Facilitator			Bonnie Glass	Facilitator
10		Student 8	Summarizer			Sabeen Qureshi	Summarizer			Student 8	Summarizer
11											
12											
13	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>		<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>		<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Student Names</b>	<b>Roles</b>
14	Breakout Group 1	Edy Kupietzky	Presenter		Breakout Group 1	Sabeen Qureshi	Presenter		Breakout Group 1	Sabeen Qureshi	Presenter
15		Sabeen Qureshi	Scribe			Student 7	Scribe			Bonnie Glass	Scribe
16		Student 5	Facilitator			Student 4	Facilitator			Student 6	Facilitator
17		Student 6	Summarizer			Student 5	Summarizer			Student 4	Summarizer
18											
19											
20	Breakout Group 2	Student 4	Presenter		Breakout Group 2	Student 8	Presenter		Breakout Group 2	Student 7	Presenter
21		Student 8	Scribe			Bonnie Glass	Scribe			Student 8	Scribe
22		Bonnie Glass	Facilitator			Student 6	Facilitator			Edy Kupietzky	Facilitator
23		Student 7	Summarizer			Edy Kupietzky	Summarizer			Student 5	Summarizer
24											

## What this looked like in Adobe Connect

To keep this chapter’s screengrabs simple while illustrating the practice of pre-assigning students to groups, we have created the images using only 8 students. The only names and images visible throughout these images are the authors’; no actual student names or images are included.

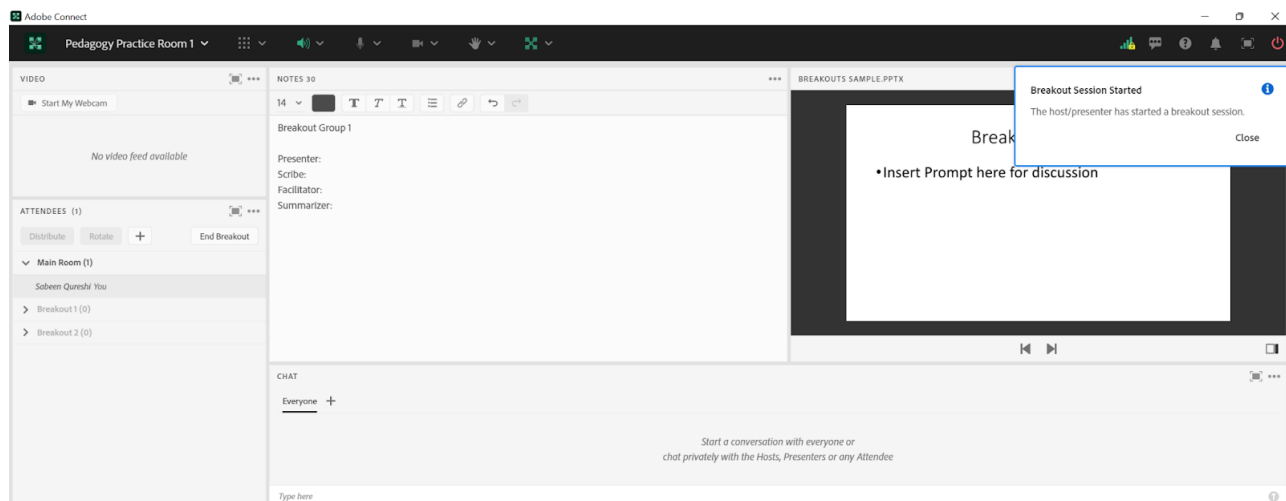
**Image 2:** Breakout template layout. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 2 Alt-Text:** The is a screengrab of a breakout template layout with a video pod, attendees pod, notes pod with the words “Breakout Group 1, Presenter, Scribe, Facilitator, and Summarizer” written on it, chat pod, and a slide with the label “Breakout Groups” and the text “Insert Prompt here for discussion.”



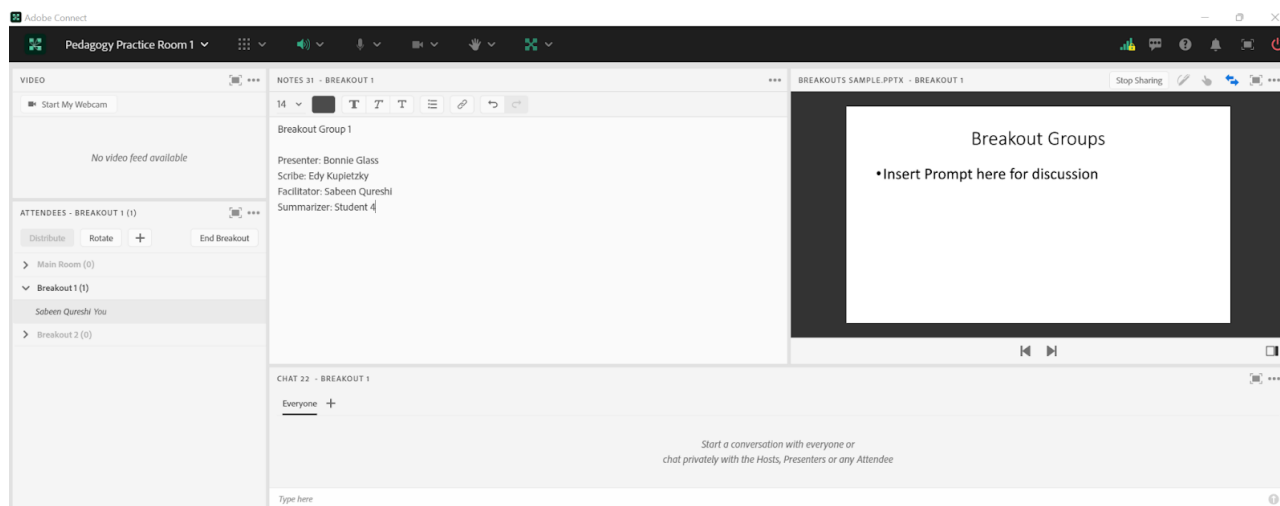
**Image 3:** Breakout room 1 View. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 3 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the same breakout room layout as Image 2. The difference from Image 2 is that the attendees pod now shows two breakout rooms, and there is a small pop-up message in the upper right corner with the message "Breakout Session Started. The host/presenter has started a breakout session."



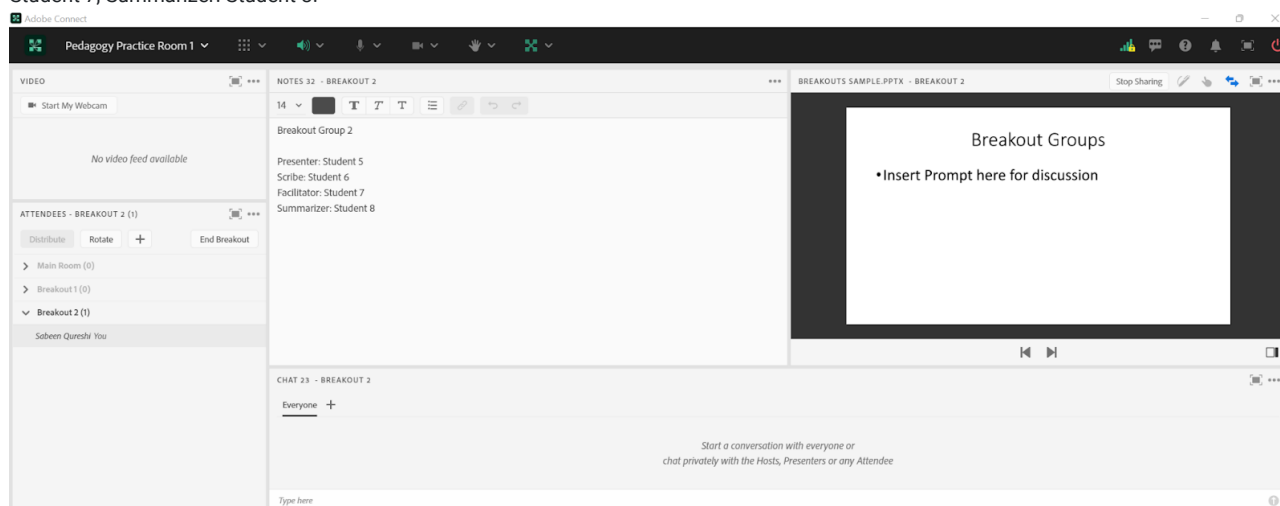
**Image 4:** Breakout group 1 view. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 4 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the same breakout room layout as Image 3. The notes pod for Breakout group 1 now has sample student names next to each role. The notes pod has the words "Breakout Group 1, Presenter: Bonnie Glass, Scribe: Edy Kupietzky, Facilitator: Sabreen Qureshi, Summarizer: Student 4."



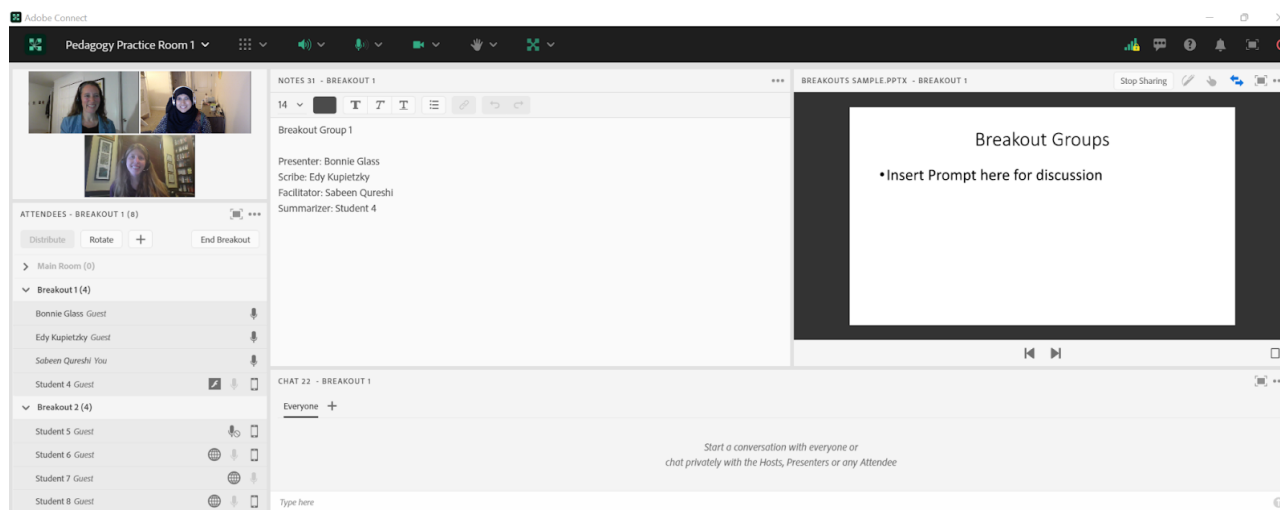
**Image 5:** Breakout group 2 View. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 5 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of breakout room 2. The layout is the same as the breakout room in Image 4. The difference is that the notes pod reflects a different group of students and includes the words “Breakout Group 2, Presenter: Student 5, Scribe: Student 6, Facilitator: Student 7, Summarizer: Student 8.”



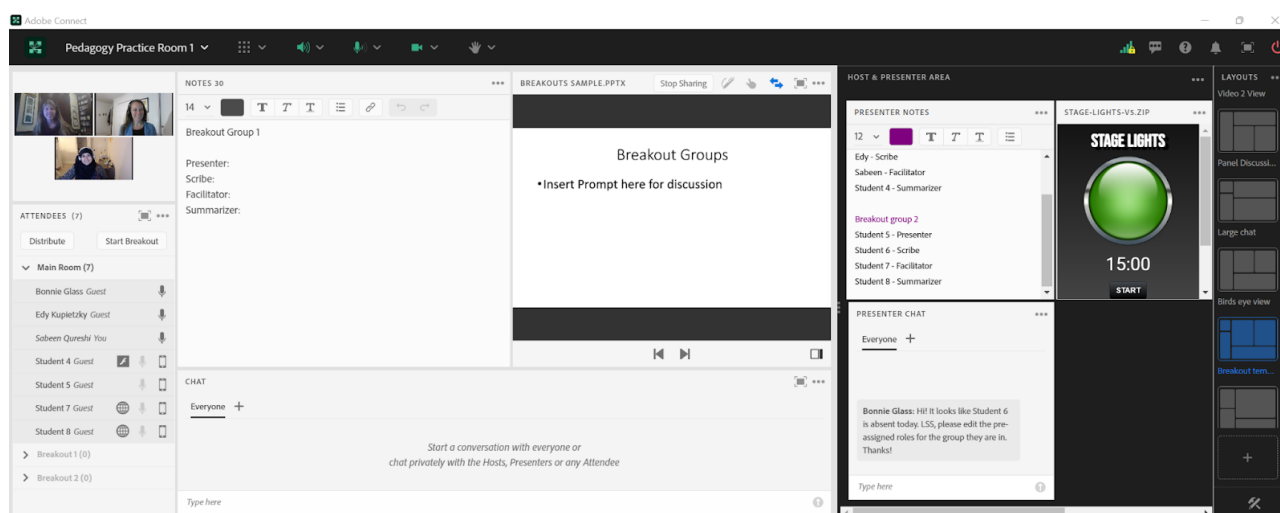
**Image 6:** Breakout group 1 view with example students present. The authors are shown on webcam in the Video pod to demonstrate what this breakout room looks like when students are in the midst of an activity. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 6 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the same group 1 breakout room as image 4. The video pod includes webcam images of the three authors. There is an attendees pod open in the Breakouts view mode showing four names under Breakout 1: “Bonnie Glass, Edy Kupietzky, Sabeen Qureshi, Student 4” as well as four names under Breakout 2: “Student 5, Student 6, Student 7, Student 8”. The notes pod, chat, and slide remain the same as image 4.



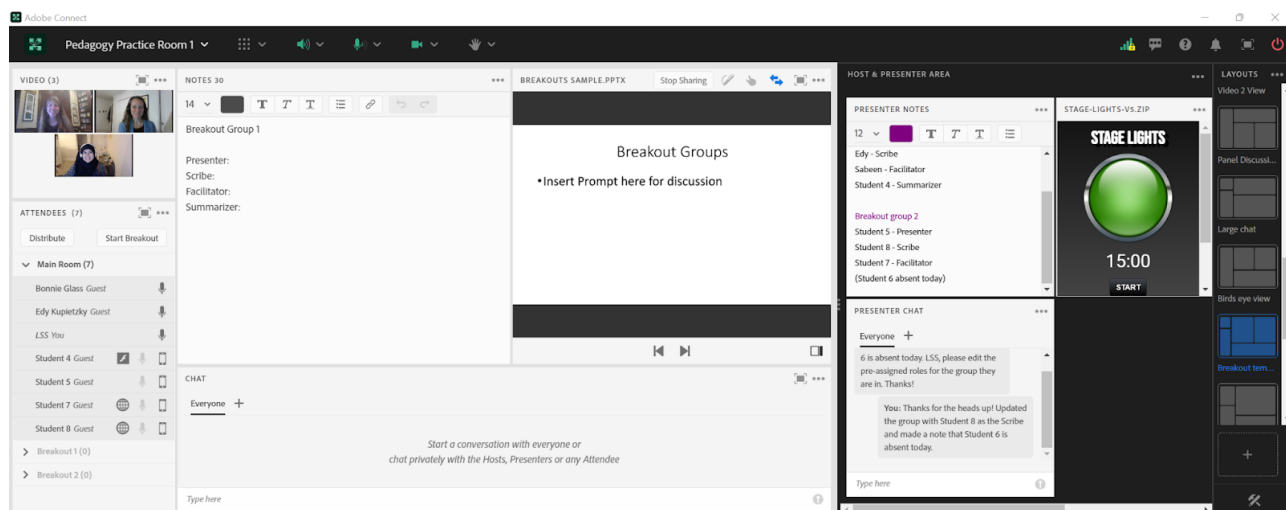
**Image 7:** Breakouts view with the Presenter-only area visible to demonstrate managing a student absence. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 7 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the same group 1 breakout room layout as Image 6 with three webcam images of the authors in the video pod. The difference is that there are seven attendees present in the attendees pod that reads: "Bonnie Glass, Edy Kupietzky, Sabeen Qureshi, Student 4, Student 5, Student 7, Student 8." Student 6 is missing. The Presenter-only area in Adobe Connect is open and visible on the right side, with the Presenter Notes pod containing the breakout group assignments for easy reference during the live class session. The Presenter Notes pod has the following text: "Edy - Scribe, Sabeen - Facilitator, Student 4 - Summarizer. Breakout group 2, Student 5 - Presenter, Student 6 - Scribe, Student 7 - Facilitator, Student 8 - Summarizer." The Presenter Chat is below the Presenter Notes pod and includes text from the instructor, Bonnie Glass, messaging the LSS: "Hi! It looks like Student 6 is absent today. LSS, please edit the pre-assigned notes for the group they are in. Thanks!" The Stage Lights pod is located to the right with a default 15:00 minute timer.



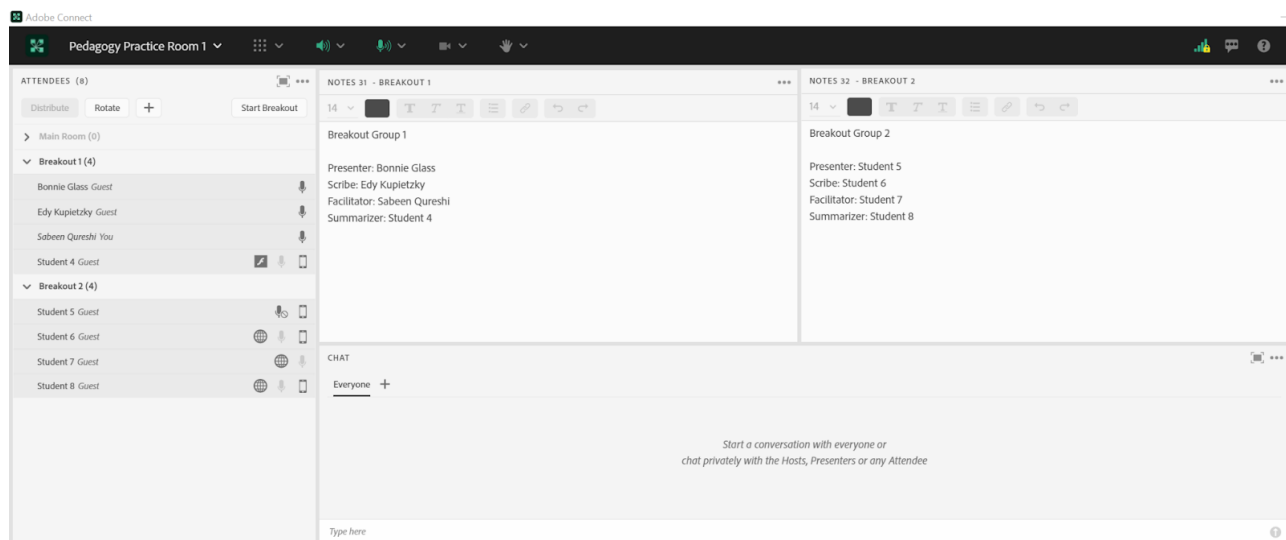
**Image 8:** Breakout with the Presenter-only area visible to continue demonstrating managing a student absence. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 8 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the same breakout room layout as image 7. The Presenter chat pod has new text with the LSS responding to the instructor, "Thanks for the heads up! Updated the group with Student 8 as the Scribe and made a note that Student 6 is absent today." The Presenter Notes pod has the new text of "Breakout group 2, Student 5 - presenter, Student 8 - Scribe, Student 7 - Facilitator, (Student 6 absent today)."



**Image 9:** Bird's-eye view layout for monitoring the breakout group activity. Adobe product screenshots reprinted with permission from Adobe.

**Image 9 Alt-Text:** This is a screengrab of the bird's-eye view layout. This is a view of the notes pods belonging to both breakout groups, for the instructional team to observe in real time while students are in breakouts. The layout includes an attendees pod that shows two breakout rooms with four students in each one, and the notes pods from the two breakout rooms take up most of the screen. The breakout 1 notes pod consists of the text "Breakout Group 1, Presenter: Bonnie Glass, Scribe: Edy Kupietzky, Facilitator: Sabeen Qureshi, Summarizer: Student 4". The breakout 2 notes pod consists of the text "Breakout Group 2, Presenter: Student 5, Scribe: Student 6, Facilitator: Student 7, Summarizer: Student 8."



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## References

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Levine, J., Marquart, M., Folk, K., Florio, M.B., and Chung, R.Y. (2021, June 9). Columbia University School of Social Work - Online Faculty Development Series. Poster for the Network for Social Work Management Forward Thinking Summit, Fordham University, New York, NY. Retrieved June 13, 2022, from <https://edtechbooks.org/-Moo>



### Bonnie Glass

Bonnie Glass is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) currently practicing in Vermont where she is Assistant Director, Clinical Supervisor, and Clinician at the Vermont Center for Resiliency. She is Senior Lecturer at Columbia University School of Social Work (CSSW) where she teaches courses on Advanced Clinical Practice, Trauma, and Spirituality. Bonnie's clinical practice, supervision, mentorship, and teaching style is rooted in an Integrative Mind-Body-Spirit Social Work approach balanced with strengths-based, empowerment, psychodynamic, and Narrative Medicine perspectives. She has over 20 years of experience serving New York City and Vermont individuals and communities as program coordinator, supervisor, grant-writer, clinical therapist, clinical forensic specialist, crisis counselor, advocate, researcher, and consultant at a variety of multi-disciplinary agencies and institutions. Bonnie was research faculty and psychedelic psychotherapist in the NYU Cancer Anxiety Psilocybin Research Study and studies Dreamwork in Clinical Practice. As a certified yoga instructor, Bonnie integrates mindfulness, yoga, and breathwork into aspects of her work. She received a MS in Social Work from CSSW and a BA from Miami University (Ohio) with a major in Psychology and a minor in Criminology. In addition to her role as social worker, Bonnie is also head coach of The University of Vermont Synchronized Skating Team.





### Edy Kupietzky

Edy Hanus Kupietzky, DrPH, MPH, LMSW is currently a clinical consultant assisting hospitals and other providers with strategies to impact employee retention, reduce burnout and improve overall employee health. Dr. Kupietzky has over twenty years of public health and medical research experience. Her focus areas include pediatric oncology, childhood cancer survivorship, asthma, and health education. She implemented interventions, research designs and assessed the psychosocial needs of patients throughout her various positions. Edy maintains her passion for public health by serving on advisory boards for health related non-for profits.

She earned her Doctor of Public Health and Master of Public Health from Columbia University, where she concentrated in sociomedical sciences, health promotion and disease prevention. She received a MS in Social Work from Columbia School of Social Work in Advanced Clinical Practice with a concentration in health, mental health, and disabilities. Edy earned her BA from Barnard College with a major in Urban Affairs and Public Health.



### Sabeen Qureshi

Sabeen Qureshi graduated with her Masters in Social Work from Columbia University School of Social Work in 2016 where she specialized in Advanced Clinical Practice with an emphasis on Family, Youth and Children. She has worked with Assertive Community Treatment teams for adults with severe mental illnesses and Residential Treatment facilities for adolescents in Long Island, NY. She graduated with her Bachelors of Science in Psychology from the University of Houston with a minor in Arabic Studies. During which she conducted research in Motivational Interviewing at Baylor College of Medicine. She has been a part of CSSW's Online Campus as a Live Support Specialist since 2017. Sabeen is passionate about advocating for Muslim Mental Health and battling cultural stigma.



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