

T4T

Tools for Teaching

Team Based Learning

How Do Teams Enhance Learning in the Classroom?

Team-Based Learning provides an opportunity for learners to apply concepts and theories while working and learning collaboratively with other people. Working on team assignments enables learners to 'pool' their skills, abilities, and resources to create more effective solutions and strategies. As well, team-based learning helps learners to enhance their collaboration, problem solving, and even conflict management skills.

What are Some Things to Remember as an Instructor Working with Teams?

There are several things to remember as an instructor working with teams. The first is that working in teams is hard work! Therefore, as an instructor, you can help teams by being very clear about what you are, and are not, evaluating. For example many teams spend too much time with copy or style edits when the instructor is more likely looking at other aspects of the work.

It's also important to remember that when a learner comes to you with a complaint about others, things are rarely how they seem at first – it is very helpful to do your research about what's really going on in the team before forming your opinion. Make sure you talk to all of the members of the team before forming an opinion about what is going on. There are as many perspectives as there are team members and they can often very different.

Teams will often try to take the path of least resistance, even when this isn't good for their learning. Although it may be expedient to just divide up the work, they should be encouraged to engage in substantive discussions about the nature of the assignment, etc., before parceling out the pieces of work.

Finally, as an instructor, it's important for you to create windows of opportunities in your course to chat with each team. Instructor intervention with teams, via a check-in process, can pre-empt many problematic issues.



What are the Signs a Team May Be in Trouble?

Here are some common signs that may indicate a team is in trouble:

1. someone is not showing up in discussions;
2. aggressive emails or posts are sent amongst the team, questioning each other or others;
3. ideas that don't get incorporated into team summaries; or
4. team papers are poorly integrated; the ideas don't quite match up. This can mean a team is dividing the work prematurely.

If you're not looking at the team discussions, check class-wide discussions for changes in a learner's tone, or their use of aggressive language.

Remember: don't own the problem!! Keep responsibility for fixing it on the team!

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... Is a publication of the Centre for Teaching and Educational Technologies at Royal Roads University.

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What Do I Do if I Notice a Team is in Trouble?

When you notice one of the above signs, or otherwise get an inkling that something may be amiss, investigate the situation fully by determining structural and/or interpersonal causes (i.e. how do they organize their work (structural) and/or how do they work with each other (interpersonal), and/or what judgements have they formed about each other?) As an instructor you can help normalize the situation by communicating that conflict is a normal part of learning.

Most importantly: Stay focused on the future and the "next steps" of the team.

Any Other Tips on Facilitating Online?

RRU uses a variety of approaches to Team-Based Learning. Most programs have residencies that often involve intense interaction amongst learners. In the online environment, there are greater differences. At the lower end, in terms of complexity, is a format that relies only on discussion board interaction and summaries of team discussions. At the higher end, teams are completing integrated research projects where they are doing a substantial amount of work outside of the online course platform. As you might imagine, the higher the level of complexity in the assignment, the more likely there will be team problems.

Here is an example of a team conflict and how you might respond.

On one team you have noticed that one of the members of the team, Pat, has not been very active on the discussion boards. In the first week he was involved but since then he has mostly been making remarks agreeing with others or repeating what had been already discussed. In the past week Pat did not contribute at all.

In order to try to support this team you contacted Pat and the team. Pat responded by telling you he did not feel comfortable writing on the platform and that by the time he was ready to make comments, others on the team had already made the point more eloquently than he could. You can tell that Pat is intimidated and some of the other team members are very good writers. Pat is an extrovert and prefers to talk more than write.

You also heard from the team that they are frustrated by Pat's lack of engagement. They feel that they are missing out on Pat's ideas and are not sure if he is really committed to the coursework. There is a team assignment coming up and they are not sure how much they can rely on Pat.

What can you do as an instructor? You could coach Pat to become a more effective contributor by explaining what you are looking for in a discussion post (i.e. some new ideas that reflect on the course readings, some questions about what others wrote, some reflections on personal experience, etc.) and offering feedback that will help Pat become more comfortable with the medium. With the team you could try to normalize this situation (it is a common one) and help them better understand how they can engage with Pat by asking specific questions and providing positive feedback. Furthermore, where possible you can make links to course or program curriculum. Most programs have content related to working with others and interpersonal communication.