Teamwork

1 What is it?

Teamwork promotes collaboration and is based on constructivism. Collaboration, which is different from cooperation (see resources), involves active learning and constructing rather than acquiring knowledge. When they work together students develop knowledge through social interaction with peers. Collaboration/teamwork according to Palloff and Pratt (2010):

- Generates in-depth knowledge
- Promotes initiative, critical thinking and creativity
- Helps students set and work towards common goals
- Addresses all learning preferences
- Enables students to work with diverse teams

2 Why is it important?

Teamwork eliminates loneliness and isolation in an online environment. Social presence or feeling of community increases learning outcomes and satisfaction. Collaborative acquisition of knowledge is ensured by sharing new ideas with groups, and by giving and receiving critical and constructive feedback (Palloff and Pratt, 2010, p.8). Think beyond the classroom outcome or content. Collaborative work prepares students for the workforce with real professional experiences (Mandernach, 2011, 8:00) instead of focusing on the grade. After teamwork in your online class, learners will be able to work in asynchronous teams.

3 How to do it?

Team Building: Boettcher and Conrad (2016) give a comprehensive list of tips to have in mind when building teams:

- The instructor should form the teams and not the students by themselves.
- Teams can be formed based on skills needed, profession, expertise, content familiarity, time zone, etc.
- Allocate students based on culture, gender, age, online work habits, and time zones.
- The number of students in each group depends on the kind and scope of a project (2-4 is ideal).
- Initial monitoring of teamwork is critical and success depends on the maturity levels of students.
- Give clear and explicit directions about project purpose and scope.
- A rubric is essential to set expectations.
- Provide directions in different formats, for instance, description in syllabus or/and synchronous Q&A sessions.
- Directions should include processes, resources, tools, timelines, and deadlines.
- Teams can be maintained throughout the course or can vary with projects.
- Instructor facilitation with reviews and feedback is essential.
- Determine if the process (e.g., group communication) and the product (e.g., assignment outcome) should both be evaluated.
- Determine who the evaluator should be (e.g.: instructor, student, or both). In some instances, the instructor may want to give students the opportunity to provide feedback to each other (peer-evaluation).
- Provide group space for students within the LMS.

Oakley, Felder, Brent, & Elhajj (2004) provide valuable insights into team formation, team management, conflict resolution and peer ratings.

Team Agreement: After building teams, ask students to sign a "Team Agreement/ Charter/Contract" before starting activities. A "Team Agreement" is simply a document that states the guidelines for interaction among members and with

the instruction; team-members' roles and responsibilities; and deadlines (Palloff and Pratt, 2010, p. 27). It will save you and your students time and stress. The team agreement also provides a great place to express expectations from the instructor and provide guidance on the type of expectations that group members should have of each other.

Group Activities: Here are some examples of teamwork activities for your online classroom (Palloff and Pratt, 2010):
- **Dyads:** Arranging students into dyads helps introduce collaborative work in the course. Ask learners to compare two sources of information to solve a task. Then, make them write a joint post in the discussion board about their findings.
- **Small group-project:** Group learners (approx. 4), and ask them to present and develop activities about a topic for the class. Distribute presentations weekly.
- **Role Playing:** Ask students to take a hypothetical look at a tricky situation they may face in their jobs. Each student must look at the problem from a different viewpoint (role) and share a well-grounded solution. Then, make students discuss their peers' interpretations. Finally, ask for a final solution as a group. Alternatives to this activity are: "Debates" using controversial topics and "Virtual Teams" asking learners to work as consultants trying to solve a problem.

Tips and Tricks
- Provide guidelines for non-participating members. For instance, group members may or may not be expected to complete work for a non-participating team member (Stavredes, 2011, p. 142). At the same time, they might be given an extension to address the non-participating member's missing work.
- Ask learners to provide a "Group availability/Contact info" document in which they share the times when they are available to work,

time zone, and contact info (e.g. email, Skype user ID) (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016, p. 219).
- Explain to your students the purpose of teamwork to avoid nonconformity, for instance, "this teamwork project intends to promote collaborative learning/real-world application/problem-based learning, etc."
- Have a plan in the event that there is a team issue (e.g., what to do when there are communication issues).

4 Additional Resources

- See Team Agreement example by Dr. Adrie Koehler-Blair.
- See Team Assessment Rubric example by Dr. Adrie Koehler-Blair.
- Collaboration vs Cooperation video
- CATME - SMARTER Teamwork
- Promoting a Positive Environment for Online Group Work by B. Jean Mandernach, PhD.
- Eight habits of successful project teams by Jerry Wellman

5 References

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