Teamwork

This document has been designed to support you with embedding teamwork skills into a unit. It will provide specific strategies to enable these skills to be written into either a course or unit.

Background

There is an increasing demand for graduates who possess skills necessary for successful integration in the workplace. One of the skills cited as being of importance to employers is that of teamwork. "Employers consistently mention collaboration and team work as being critical skills, essential in almost all working environments." (Luca & Tarricone, 2002, p.54)

Few professions allow for work to occur in isolation. Often a team of people are required to use their specialised skills to produce the desired end product. To this end, it is important that students are provided with the opportunity to not only work in teams, but to also learn about the types of roles found in teams and the kinds of skills that will help create a cohesive and efficient team.

Students often complain about working in groups because there is a lack of appreciation about the different ways members of the team interact and little understanding about how to work efficiently in a team. Therefore it is important that when creating assignments that requires teamwork, explicit instruction is also given about how to engage in a team successfully.

It is also important to avoid giving students tasks to work through as a team that can be completed more effectively as an individual.

Elements need to work in a team

There are many different roles that are required within a team. Whatever the different roles that are ascribed to different people in the team, it is important to also support the idea of flexibility. The roles that we undertake differ depending on circumstance and a "good" team member knows how to take on different roles as required.

To work effectively in a group requires more than simply being able to do "your job". There are numerous skills and attributes that come into play if a student is to successfully engage with the group.

Some of the skills required include:

- ability to negotiate;
- maintaining open communication;
- willingness to take on responsibility;
- flexibility; and
- active listening.

How to place people in teams

Different methods of creating groups include:

- **Grouping according to last name-** this is quick and efficient, but may mean that students always work together with the same people,
- **Randomised numbering-** as you walk around the tutorial room, you appoint each student a number. The numbers that you use correlate with the group numbers for each student.

- **Student self-selection-** for shorter activities this can be a useful technique to use. However, it doesn't require students to interact with new people and can be somewhat limited. Students may also use the time to socialize rather than work.
- *Location-* you may just want students to move slightly so that they are facing other students to form a group. For very quick questioning and short tasks, this can be the most efficient method.
- **According to ability/temperament-** After some observation of students you may want to group them according to their ability. This can allow for a constructivist approach to learning where students look to one another to develop their understandings of different concepts. You can ask students to write a favourite topic/sport/ area of future career interest etc, and match them according to this.

How to place people in teams

In-class ideas:

1. Ask students to create a teamwork contract. One of the most difficult elements in creating a successful group is highlighting the different members' expectations in terms of grade desired, workload commitment, work rate and so on. An upfront approach means that students are forced into negotiation from the beginning and conflicting interests can be dealt with before they become problematic.
2. Jigsaw activities- students work together to find out pieces of information. They then come together, add all the information they have gathered and create a "big picture" answer to a problem inclusive of all angles.
3. Provide some time in class for students to organise contact details, meeting times and places. Also s how students how to use programs such as typewithme or Google docs.
4. xplicitly teach the different elements needed to work successfully in a group. For example teaching s tudents how to develop:
   - A ppropriate timelines for goal attainment;
   - O pportunities for equal input; or
   - A respectful team environment.

Online ideas:

1. Create a discussion board (DB) for students to come together to discuss assignment.
2. Provide written instructions/videos/podcasts for students to use different programs to help organise work.
3. Build in ''getting to know you'' activities to be completed online.
4. Create a guide for appropriate netiquette to use.
5. Embed technology in the work that needs to be done. Avoid using it as an add-on t work that is being completed in class.

Assessing team work skills

Me mbers of the team are often the most capable of determining how well the different members acted. One of the key elements that need to be considered is the type of evidence that you can ask for to show how different tea m members contributed to the task. There are many different ways of recording and maintaining this info rmation. For example, students can use wikis, blogs, meeting minutes, records from Google docs or typ ewithme docs. The need to maintain evidence can be built in to the assignment criteria. This also helps students when trying to determine how much effort was put into an activity by another team member and can support their judgment. It can also be retained if students look to query a grade they received.

Ma rks can be assigned to students in various ways. Some will include an individual score plus a score based on the group's decisions. Others will be based purely on the group's output, and yet others will look to focus on what the individual achieved within that group. When deciding which approach to take, consider what asp ect of group work you are looking to prioritise, this will help determine which marking method you adopt.

Johnson (1999) provides some examples of how marks can be determined including: :
1. Individual score plus the group's score for the project.
2. Group receives one score based on the project result.
3. Group score plus points from group members for effort and contribution.

How to problem shoot!

If a student is not participating (working to a set deadline):

1. Remind students that they will be asked to assess each group member's contribution.
2. Include some additional reward for students who can evidence active participation from all members.
3. Provide incentive (additional feedback) for students who meet mini-deadlines.
4. Ask the students to record any attempt to facilitate discussion with the member not engaging. Students need to demonstrate how they have worked to involve and reconcile issues.
5. At set points throughout the task, ask random members of the group to stand up and explain what they are doing and why. This will help ensure that all students are engaged in the learning process and have a part to play in the group

If a student wants to work alone:

1. Provide limited (concrete materials) to each group.
2. Suggest a role change so that the student takes on a secondary role in the group.
3. Structure activity so that it can't be completed without input from other students.
4. Ask the students to record any attempt to facilitate discussion with the member not engaging. Students need to demonstrate how they have worked to involve and reconcile issues.

Summary

Effective participation in a team relies on the combination of several skills and attributes. Merely requiring students to work in groups does not guarantee the development of these. There needs to be specific support and scaffolding in place to help students learn how to be a positive team member. A combination of guided team work activities and explicit teaching of the requisite skills will provide a sound foundation for students' future team work efforts.

Looking for more information?

If you would like to know more, these links will take you to useful information about teamwork. Monash University- http://www.eng.monash.edu.au/current-students/download/groupwork.pdf

References

Johnson, D. & Johnson, F. (1999). Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning. (5th ed.) Allyn and Bacon: Boston.

Tarricone, P., & Luca, J. (2002). Employees, teamwork and social interdependence - A formula for successful business. Team Performance Management, 8(3, 4), 54-59.