

## Team-Based Learning: **KEY TEACHING ACTIVITIES**

If a teacher can learn how to do each of the following 7 activities well, they can use team-based learning effectively.

### **A. Beginning of the Course**

#### **1. Forming the groups**

- Ideal size: 5-7 members
- Once formed, groups are permanent for the rest of the course.
- Form the groups in a public and visible way, e.g., have students stand up and count off.
  - Do this in a way that distributes students' subject-relevant knowledge and experiences.
  - Do NOT use students' grade point average.

#### **2. Getting students comfortable talking to each other and the teacher**

- In the first class session, have some activities that engage students in talking to each other and to the teacher. They need to know from the very beginning that this is the way this course will operate – and to get comfortable doing so.

#### **3. Setting up the grading system**

- The grading system should have three components:
  - A set of INDIVIDUALLY graded tasks
  - A set of GROUP graded tasks
  - PEER EVALUATION: Some way for each group to evaluate the performance of each individual in the group, and for this assessment to be factored into the course grade for each student.
- The relative weight for each of these three components (or their sub-components) can be determined by the teacher or by the class. The "Grade Weight Setting Exercise" is an effective way for the class to do this.
  - Graded group work can vary in its relative weight, but the quality of the group work needs to "matter." Therefore this portion of the total course grade should be worth at least 20-40% of the total course grade.

### **B. During the Course**

#### **1. Use application exercises that are good for groups.**

- These can be either graded or un-graded exercises. Either way, however, it is essential that the groups learn how good their answers were (or were not).
- These exercises should be constructed so that:
  - The tasks are meaningful and related to the ultimate learning goals.
  - Successful performance by the groups will require them to engage in a high level of INTRA-group dialogue.
  - Group answers/responses can be displayed easily and quickly.
  - We strongly recommend using assignments that are characterized by "4's":
    - **Significant Problem.** Individuals/groups should work on a problem that is significant to students.
    - **Same Problem.** Individuals/groups should work on the same problem, case or question.

- **Specific Choice.** Individuals/groups should be required to use course concepts to make a specific choice.
- **Simultaneous Report.** Whenever possible individuals and groups should report their choices simultaneously.

**Note:** Having groups write a term paper or any other kind of lengthy document is NOT a good group assignment. Creating lengthy documents seldom promotes a high level of discussion—either within or between groups.

## 2. Provide **feedback** that helps the groups and individuals learn.

- The feedback on the application exercises should be: frequent and immediate.
- The feedback should come in a form that allows the individuals and students to see what was good about their response and what could have been better. Usually this can be accomplished by allowing them to compare their response with the responses of other groups, as well as occasionally getting an assessment from the teacher.

## C. **End of the Course**

### 1. **Culminating project**

- The culminating project for a 2-3 week unit (or for the whole course) should be something that integrates as much of the course content as possible.
- Hence it should be a complex, challenging task, but must still be characterized by the “4S’s” (see above).
- This will generally be a graded project. So the teacher needs to know how to distinguish between a “poor”, “mediocre”, and “excellent” response. Sometimes it is a valuable learning activity to have the class develop the assessment criteria *before* they start working on the project.

### 2. **Peer evaluation**

- At the end of the course, each student needs to complete an evaluation of in the other members of their team. This evaluation needs to be set up in a way that the teacher can put a “peer evaluation score” for each student into that student’s course grade.
- The criteria for the peer evaluation can be provided by the teacher, or generated by the class or by each team.
- The evaluation should have a numerical component accompanied by a brief narrative statement for each student.
- Some teachers find it valuable to do a peer evaluation in the middle of the course. The results are provided back to students but they are not recorded in the grade book.

**Note:** There are three types of valuable resources for learning how to do each of these tasks.

1. **Books:** *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching* (2004) and *Team-Based Learning in Health Professions Education* (2007). (Larry K. Michaelsen is the senior editor of both books and they are published Stylus, Arlington, VA.)
2. **Websites:** [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org) (the “official” TBL site), [www.tlcollaborative.org](http://www.tlcollaborative.org) (a site for health professions educators) and, [http://cis.apsc.ubc.ca/wiki/index.php/Team-Based\\_Learning](http://cis.apsc.ubc.ca/wiki/index.php/Team-Based_Learning) (a site for engineering educators). Each of these sites has multiple sub-sections many of which have valuable resources for educators from any discipline.
3. **TBL Listserv:** Anyone can sign up for this listserv from [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org) main page. It currently has approximately 200 people, 20% of whom live outside the US. It usually has an active dialogue when people pose questions.