

Managing and Facilitating Student Learning in Teams in Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective management of teamwork is essential in active and collaborative learning environments. Teamwork encompasses numerous aspects related to team formation, conflicts, and performance, with several effective practices being discussed in the literature. Tuckman's framework on the four stages of team development describes how teams evolve, passing through the four sequential stages of forming, storming, norming, and performing. The objective of this study was to identify good practices of teamwork spanning all of Tuckman's four stages. A survey was designed based on a literature review of effective teamwork strategies for each of the stages of team development. The purpose of the survey was to examine how practitioners in higher education adopt these teamwork strategies. The survey results highlight the most effective teamwork practices for each team development stage. This chapter contributes to the understanding of effective teamwork strategies identified in the literature on teaching in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores teamwork as part of active, collaborative and blended learning and how effective teamwork is facilitated. The authors wanted to understand how student teams mature and evolve over time, using Tuckman's (1965) framework of team development. Tuckman's (1965) seminal work is considered a guiding study for understanding how teams develop in sequential stages of forming, storming, norming and performing. Each of these stages is identified by descriptive social and interpersonal team activities and team task activities.

The objective of this chapter was to identify the practice of effective teamwork based on strategies and interventions aligned with Tuckman's (1965) four stages of teamwork in the context of Higher Education (HE). The intention was also to examine how practitioners implement effective teamwork strategies in their teaching. The chapter first considers the literature on team formation and dynamics in professional and educational contexts. It then describes the results of a practitioner survey, which was informed by the literature review. It concludes with recommendations for further research and tips for effective teamwork in HE.

Background

Active learning is defined as learning that “involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 19). Active and collaborative learning encompasses methods involving students working together towards a common goal, collaborating on tasks or activities and contributing to classroom discussions (Kuh, 2003; QAA, 2020). Blended learning is defined as “a combination of face-to-face learning and dynamic digital activities and content that facilitate anytime/anyplace learning” (Hibberson et al., 2020). Active Blended Learning (ABL) has become a key learning and teaching approach, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased online and blended education. ABL is “a pedagogical approach that combines sense-making activities with focused student interactions (with content, peers and tutors) in appropriate learning settings – in and outside the classroom” (University of Northampton, 2020).

Approaches, such as Team-Based Learning (TBL), Student-Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies (SCALE-UP) (Beichner, 2006) and flipped classroom, blend in-class with out-of-class or online learning, including knowledge-based and authentic, theory-into-practice learning. Therefore, at the centre of collaborative learning are active blended pedagogies that involve students in sustained teamwork (Palmer et al., 2017).

The benefits of engaging students in teamwork are widely discussed in the literature (Baker et al., 2005; Riebe et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2016; Volkov & Volkov, 2015). While there are numerous benefits of using teamwork in teaching, its effectiveness is largely based on positive team engagement.

As part of the Catalyst programme *Addressing Barriers to Student Success*, funded by the Office for Students (OfS), three universities undertook a project focusing on scaling up active collaborative learning (ACL) for student success between March 2017 and February 2019 (NTU, 2019). For this research, Nottingham Trent University (NTU), the University of Bradford (UoB) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) looked at the benefits as well as the challenges and barriers of ACL (Berkson & Richter, 2018, 2019, 2020). The project found that negative team dynamics can be a major obstacle in promoting ACL. The project undertook a cross-institutional student questionnaire, which was completed by 236 students taking TBL modules at ARU in Semester 2 of 2017/8 and Semester 1 of 2018/9. While a two-thirds

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