


# Chapter 2

## Classrooms as Learning Labs for Virtual Collaboration and Learner Agency: Collaborative Learning, Learning Lab, Agency, Threefold Path to High-Performance Virtual Teams

**Trina L. Hoefling**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6887-1274>

*University of Southern California, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Instructors can adapt curriculum so that learners have the competencies needed for a fulfilling career working well with others, together or apart. A curriculum can easily embed teamwork, coach learners into good study habits, and teach them how to write, present, follow instructions, and think critically. Today's instructors guide learners to creatively imagine and innovate beyond perceived limitations, including distance and time barriers of online learning and remote work. Groups can be learning labs where learners work together, hold each other accountable, and deliver group assignments. Today's workforce must collaborate and work well with others. This chapter provides a framework for designing and managing online courses for creative collaboration. Instructors will share responsibility for a successful learning experience by engaging learners in decisions and creating future team leaders. The framework lays out three pathways that develop a workforce that is competent, innovative, connected, engaged, flexible, and virtual.*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0375-8.ch002

## INTRODUCTION

Your classroom – online or blended – is a ripe pathway for learners to practice collaboration on online and hybrid temporary teams, with students learning together as well as individually. Once a course is designed for creative collaboration, your job gets easier while still being able to impart knowledge to learners, facilitate their skill development, and prepare them for today’s workplace.

How you facilitate your course and assign group projects can develop core virtual teaming competencies. The digital classroom is also a “place” for learners to grow a personal network of lifelong professional colleagues who have learned by working together with shared responsibility for outcomes. “Estimates show between seventy and eighty percent of all jobs are never posted. That ‘hidden job market’ can be difficult to tap into without having a powerful network,” according to Forbes Council member Jeffrey Ton (Ton, 2020). Networking isn’t just about jobs, though. Today’s professionals can’t know everything and must learn quickly. In the fast-changing workplace, it’s common to need to get reliable advice from people we trust and rely on for their subject matter expertise and, sometimes, discretion or ability to explain things clearly. Google search or AI summary doesn’t replace solid knowledge or advice from a trusted colleague. Your classroom is a learning lab for everyone to grow their professional networks that can serve them, if maintained, for a lifetime.

When learners realize they have some responsibility for the learning experience, they focus on more than just the grade, thereby developing a broader understanding of agency that includes considering their classmates. To help you accomplish collaboration, this chapter describes design and facilitation principles that support engaged learners and prepare them to be members of and lead high-performance collaborative, virtual teams that can adapt, innovate, and continuously perform. Everything shared in this chapter applies in both blended and fully online courses, though for simplicity, I will proceed referring only to online learning in fully remote or blended environments.

This chapter provides a pathway to:

1. Redesign activities and assignments to require coordinated student effort using a simple hybrid team model, the Threefold Path to High-Performance Virtual Teams™.
2. Teach communication and peer learning strategies in virtual and hybrid environments while continuing to teach course content.
3. Establish clear expectations for online interactions and shared responsibility for learning from peers and the instructor.

32 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/classrooms-as-learning-labs-for-virtual-collaboration-and-learner-agency/385956](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/classrooms-as-learning-labs-for-virtual-collaboration-and-learner-agency/385956)

## Related Content

---

### Navigating Challenges and Mitigating Stereotypes in Digital, Interdisciplinary, and International Student Teams: "It's Like Being Stuck in the Mud"

Anett Hermann (2026). *Sustaining Creative Collaboration in Student Virtual Teams in Higher Education: Resources, Norms and Protocols, and Continual Assessment and Learning* (pp. 245-280).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-challenges-and-mitigating-stereotypes-in-digital-interdisciplinary-and-international-student-teams/386490](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/navigating-challenges-and-mitigating-stereotypes-in-digital-interdisciplinary-and-international-student-teams/386490)

### Promoting Sustainable Collaborative Mobile Learning Approaches for Remote Work Practices

Alaa Al Amoudi (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 219-236).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-sustainable-collaborative-mobile-learning-approaches-for-remote-work-practices/281452](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-sustainable-collaborative-mobile-learning-approaches-for-remote-work-practices/281452)

### Sustainable Business Models Implementation in Industry: Strategies and Challenges – A Systematic Review

Suhaila Abdalla Merghani (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 237-261).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-business-models-implementation-in-industry/281453](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/sustainable-business-models-implementation-in-industry/281453)

### Big Data HE Communities: Could Twitter Support UK Universities Amid the COVID-19 Transition?

Farag Edghiemand Moheeb Abualqumboz (2021). *Remote Work and Sustainable Changes for the Future of Global Business* (pp. 33-44).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/big-data-he-communities/281442](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/big-data-he-communities/281442)

**Classrooms as Learning Labs for Virtual Collaboration and Learner Agency:  
Collaborative Learning, Learning Lab, Agency, Threefold Path to High-  
Performance Virtual Teams**

Trina L. Hoefling (2026). *Cultivating Creative Collaboration in Student Virtual Teams in Higher Education: Design and Climate* (pp. 37-70).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/classrooms-as-learning-labs-for-virtual-collaboration-and-learner-agency/385956](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/classrooms-as-learning-labs-for-virtual-collaboration-and-learner-agency/385956)