Improving Team Projects

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Let's face it, team projects can sometimes be a challenge. However, there are techniques you can use to strengthen your team projects and make the experience a more positive one for students.

What does a well-structured team project look like?

A well-structured team project has students working together over a longer duration (no one-off activities). This can be a project lasting for a few weeks or even for the entirely of the course. The project should contribute to both formative and summative goals and not just be a "patchwork" project where each member works independently and combines each piece at the end. The project should be structured so that students rely on one another. This means the project must be sufficiently complex, require a range of knowledge and skills, and benefit from multiple minds coming together.

Once you have the project detailed, there are a few things you will want to ensure you do correctly: setting up the teams, setting expectations, and creating space for collaboration. Let's look at each.

Setting Up Teams

First consider the size. Generally, teams of 3-5 are ideal. We want to limit the size of the team to allow space for all members to share thoughts but keep them large enough to get a variety of perspectives.

If possible, set up groups with a mix of abilities and backgrounds and based on common availability. How can you do that, you ask? Consider sending out a brief survey to the class

asking about their background and availability to meet with a group outside of class. You then create mixed groups that can meet at similar times. A bit more work up front, but can result in a better group experience (and fewer frustrated emails to you!).

Setting Expectations

Share the purpose and benefits of teamwork so students can see the importance and relevance.

Don't assume students know how to work in teams. Provide resources for them to review. You can also have an open discussion about many of the challenges that can come with teamwork and how to overcome them. Ask students to share their experiences, including when a team project worked well and when it didn't and why it may have ended up that way.

Then have the students help create a set of expectations and guidelines. This can also be done within the teams themselves. This, often referred to as a Team Charter, includes clear roles and responsibilities, expectations around quality of work and participation in group meetings, and milestones.

Create Space for Collaboration

- In an asynchronous online course, ensure that there is a discussion forum space for students to connect.
- For in-person courses, devote class time for teamwork development.
- In a synchronous session, you can use breakout rooms so students can spend some time discussing or planning their work.

Try these techniques for your next team project!

Save the Date!

Teaching & Learning Day Winter 2023 is on Monday, February 27, 2023 at Newnham Campus! It is a one-day conference dedicated to showcasing and sharing ideas and activities about how to enhance teaching and learning. The focus of *Teaching & Learning Day Winter 2023* is on **Educational Technology**.

More details will be coming soon!

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