ONLINE TEAM-BASED LEARNING (TBL)
A Quick-Start Guide for Teaching and Learning

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Online Team-Based Learning (TBL)

Learn more about Team-Based Learning here: https://vimeo.com/51713733

***This Quick-Start Guide would not be possible if not for the ground-breaking research and practice I have learned from (Michaelson, Knight, Roberson, Sibley, Reimers to name a few). A special thank you to Dr. Anita Bialunska who shared how she set up her Blackboard course in her undergraduate DRSC 4311: The Science of Collaboration in Rehabilitation Sciences class.

Teaching and Learning Considerations

Much of higher education puts students in silos. It is no wonder that when the words “group work,” “teamwork,” and “collaboration” are uttered, they are ironically met with a collective groan. The “Introverts,” the “Type-A Overachievers,” the “Freeloaders,” the “Unprepared”—we have labels for the personalities that make group dynamics. Students will inevitably complain of dysfunctional groups, as they usually perceive themselves as being the ones “doing all the work.”

Faculty can also be challenged with the socializing process of group work—coaching students, assigning roles, and mediating conflict between students. Not to mention how to distribute grades fairly, or how to hold students accountable. A lot of effort goes into classes that implement curriculum, projects and assignments that require collaboration.

Team-Based Learning (TBL) is an activity-intensive strategy, which significantly alters the instructor’s role from that of “presenter” of information to “designer” and “facilitator” of engaging classroom assignments and activities. It is also seen as a specialized example of what is typically called a flipped classroom approach. The values of TBL remain in any format—including the fully online environment. This is because TBL is not only about people, but the design of our courses and assignments as well.

Team-Based Learning focuses on learning goals (outcomes) and performance related to those goals. The reasoning is simple: if we make the expected outcome clear, indicate what a successful performance looks like, design relevant learning activities for practice, and provide tools and processes for feedback and self-assessment, students will figure out for themselves which group behaviors are effective or not.

Michaelson and Knight (2002) helped to establish the groundwork on designing team assignments to promote student engagement, encourage team cohesion, and minimize the social dysfunction in groups. Consider their 5 variables to determine if an assignment will contribute to effective teamwork:

**Is there individual accountability for each team member built into the assignment?** If a team is even modestly successful with input from only one or two members in an initial task, it is very easy for that team to develop a norm for future activities that says some members will contribute a lot and others will contribute very little. On the other hand, using initial team tasks—from Day One of the course—that explicitly require individual work followed by input from all team members establishes a dynamic that prevents social loafing from occurring in the first place.

**Does the assignment bring members into close communication proximity?** Being in close proximity ensures that team members will at least begin the team development process by acquiring a set of common experiences. While Michaelson and Knight encourage physical proximity in F2F classes, for online courses, setting up students in Groups, with accessible communication tools, can allow for similar interaction and benefits.
Does the assignment create the self-evident need for intense discussion among team members? A common example of this kind of task is asking students to apply a theory, rule, or principle to specific circumstances, such as in a case or scenario. The specificity of the presented situation means that simple knowledge-sharing will not be sufficient. Responding to a scenario forces debate among students, requiring them to interpret what they know formally and abstractly in order to be able to apply it to specific realities.

Do students receive immediate, unambiguous, and meaningful feedback on what they have done as a team? The more immediate and unambiguous the feedback, the greater its value to both learning and team cohesiveness. This can be done in the Group communication areas you have set up, or via Blackboard Retention Center. Scaffold the feedback for important achievement milestones for the assignment.

Does the task provide explicit rewards for team performance? The most obvious way to create incentives for members to devote time and energy to teamwork is to include some team performance as part of our grading system. If teamwork counts, then cohesiveness increases because team members have a clear and concrete reason to work together.

By contrast, consider the group assignments that may lead to greater group dysfunction:

If the assignment is too easy, it encourages completion by 1-2 members of the group, and thus also encourages freeloaders.

If the assignment does not require diverse-thinking into a single, consensus-based output, there will be little motivation for in-depth discussion or meaningful contribution from students.

And the big one, if the assignment requires cooperative learning, rather than collaborative learning, you can expect students to divide up the work, each taking a part that require the least amount of effort on their part, with little to no interaction or exposure to new concepts or anything intellectually challenging. Worse, you will receive either a fragmented final product, or 1-2 students who did all the work!

Best Practices:

Permanent Team Formation: established at the beginning of the semester, assigned by instructor (not self-selected), 5-7 members, assigned an engaging, decision-based activity on Day 1.

Readiness Assurance Process: If teams are to bond and learn to collaborate, they will need to experience the shared challenge of getting themselves adequately prepared individually and holding themselves accountable for that effort. This can be done with scholarly readings, mini-lectures, video, etc.

The Individual Readiness Assessment Test (iRAT) is specifically designed to occur without handholding. It challenges students to begin taking personal responsibility for their own preparation. Also, because it is designed to be difficult for a less-than-committed reader, it creates a certain amount of “productive frustration,” so as to activate the perception that having peers to help might be desirable.

The Team Readiness Assessment Test (tRAT) is the same test taken again, as a team. It has a different function: it replaces the instructor’s handholding. Students struggle together, learn to coach one another, give mutual feedback, and provide the emotional support needed to prevail through the necessary struggle.

All Teams Work on the Same Problem: In order to facilitate a deeper exchange between members and other teams, individuals and teams must all have a common frame of reference. That commonality is derived by having everyone work on the exact same challenge. Having a common task allows for comparison, first among team members, and then among teams.
Teams Are Required to Make a Specific, Singular Choice (Decision): The best type of activity to accomplish this goal through a situation/scenario and or “make-a-specific choice” activities. This forces students to weigh competing priorities, values, arguments, interpretations, theories and the relevance of specific facts, in making their decision. Some examples:

A patient comes into emergency with the following symptoms...
What is the first thing you would do? And why?
What is the first test you would order? And why?
What would be the worst thing to do? And why?

Given 3 possible programs to end homelessness in your city, select the program that is the best and will likely be most strongly supported by local agencies and Civic leaders?

What is the most relevant theory that explains the behavior in the video you just watched?

What of the following passage in the Bhagavad Gita best illustrates reflection about the nature of Krishna’s divinity? (Dubois)

If a moving vehicle overloaded this bridge structure, which component would likely fail first?

After assessing Client X’s dining room what would be your first recommendation to protect her from falls?

Provide Immediate Feedback When the immediate feedback to a team is positive, it validates team decisions that are sound, and therefore helps the team bond through greater confidence and a stronger sense of identity. When the feedback is negative, it can have a useful corrective effect, and help team processes by affecting members who have been either too assertive or too quiet.

Be Sure Students Know About Your Course Design/Pedagogy: You will be teaching a course in a very different manner from other courses—you need to inform and help students understand the TBL framework you are using. It’s the first step to their decision-making (whether or not to stay in your class) and their buy-in!

Getting Started: Blackboard Groups

To get started with an online component of Team-Based Learning, it all starts with the Bb Group functionality. Blackboard allows us to create and put students in small groups for instructional models like TBL. This is especially helpful when there are more than 25 students who regularly participate in an online course, as
certain areas of the Bb course can become over-whelming for students and difficult to manage for the instructor.

**Discussion boards, for example,** become populated with so many postings that students and faculty feel inundated with the amount of information to read through and/or reply to. While the discussion board is critical to successful online courses, creative strategies need to be identified to help manage large online classes, using TBL or just Bb Groups in general.

**Note:** Incorporating “Groups” into an online course comes with some minor added responsibilities that needed to be addressed. Once the course had started, it is important to be aware of any students who were added late to the course. These students needed to be quickly placed into one of the groups, so that they would have access to group tools and their classmates.

**Click on circle with + sign**—Adding Tool Link.
Enter “Teams” as name of Link.
Click on Type box and select “Groups”

Click on the link “Teams” on your navigation bar and you will be able to create Groups, name them, and add members.
You should not let students choose their groups—this is something you will decide for the semester. You need to have Teams/Groups created, so you can provide tools, and access to assignments and assessments.

Readiness Assurance Tests: iRat and tRat

iRAT—a formative individual quiz/test with multiple-choice questions that are graded automatically. By using specific feedback settings students cannot see their results, until faculty unhide them after they are done with tRAT.

tRAT—a formative team quiz/test—team members work collaboratively to complete this assessment.
Within a module, it looks similar to this:

Students don’t see the iRAT until the beginning of class. They also don’t see the tRAT until faculty make it available.

Setting Up the iRAT (Individual Readiness Assurance Test)

You want to create your test prior to setting up your Groups if possible. Here is an overview of instructions on how to do that:
**Click Test** within Course Tools
**Click Test** in a next window
**Click Build Test**

**Enter your quiz name**- in the case below, Quiz #3 is the name of the Individual (iRAT). Add description and instruction etc.
After clicking **Submit** you can create questions or get them from your Test Pool.

You don’t have to give each question a title—can just begin entering text in the box.
Don’t need to number \((a, b, c...\) because best practices would encourage you to randomize.

When you enter all answers and set which one is correct – click Submit and Create Another or Submit. Then Select All and enter number of points for correct response for all questions and click Update.

You can modify number of points for each question separately.

Then, at the bottom in the right click OK – and you have test with questions created!

**Add the iRat to Your Module**

Click Assessment
Click Test
Then select your iRAT and Submit
Enter **Name of Link** (how it is presented in Module) – in this case we called it Quiz #3 Individual (iRAT). Enter a short description and you can also add icon.

Scroll down and select the rest of test parameters. We don’t want students see results of iRAT (neither from separate questions, nor from all quiz).

You can control this in Grading center – the students can see results after they are done with **team RAT (tRAT)** – unhide the results in Grading center (explained below) when you are ready.

Finally, set how each question is presented (one and randomly – when they begin tRAT they need to read and discuss each question and answer specifically, and not just based what they remember from iRAT).

**Next Step: Grading Center**

Go to Grade Center in **Course Management section**
Click on **Grade Center**
Click **Full Grade Center**

You can see a table with all of your current grading columns. Scroll to right and look for a column with your individual iRAT. Click small arrow next to name of your iRAT to see options.

Click **“Hide from students (on/off)”**
You should see a red mark showing that results from this test are hidden from students until you remodify it. Don’t forget to show the results to students eventually!

YOUR iRAT IS ALL SET!

Setting Up the tRAT (Team Readiness Assurance Test)

In your module click **Assessments**

Then click **Assignment**

Enter name of your tRAT – Quiz #3 Team (tRAT) is being used as placeholder.

Enter in the description that this is the tRAT.
You can add icon if you want.
Set Due Date

Set points number (total for all questions).

Click Submission Details

Select Group Submission

You should see your teams.

Select them all and click an arrow on the right

Now you should see your Teams.
Make assignment available. Set day and time that it will be available.

YOUR tRAT IS ALL SET!

A Final Note on Team-Based Learning TBL

The first implementation of a TBL course can be a challenge. Don’t worry if you aren’t perfect the first time around, and don’t let a few resistant students stop you from moving forward!

It’s perfectly natural for a few students to push back at first—you are using a teaching approach that is not the norm—they are coming from many, many classes with traditional structures and used to being passive in a class (and online).

Be prepared to explain to students that your course is designed to teach them how to use their knowledge, which will prepare them for real-world success.