

## Unit 5: Collaborative Teaching and Learning Strategies

Collaborative learning is an instructional method in which students team together on an assignment. In this method, students can produce the individual parts of a larger assignment individually and then “assemble” the final work together, as a team. Whether for a semester-long project with several outcomes or a single question during class, collaborative learning can vary greatly in scope and objectives. Cooperative learning, sometimes confused with collaborative learning, describes a method where students work together in small groups on a structured activity. Students are individually accountable for their work but also for the work of the group as a whole, and both products are assessed.

### Learning Objectives

- To explore various instructional approaches to collaborative learning
- To understand team-based learning as an approach to collaborative learning
- To practice integrating collaborative learning into a course in a way that aligns with student learning objectives and intended outcomes

Participants may have varied experience and a limited understanding of collaborative learning and its potential to enhance instruction. Unit 1 of this workshop guide suggests a poll and activity to better understand participants’ background and experience in this area. Once the workshop facilitators have a better understanding of the group, they might decide to introduce some examples that illustrate various collaborative learning methods.

The Illinois Online Network offers several strategies for collaborative learning (see <http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/instructionalstrategies.asp>). Some activities or assignments well suited for collaborative learning include:

- Case studies
- Discussions
- Student-moderated discussions
- Debates
- Collaborative writing
- Collaborative presentation
- Games
- Demonstrations

### Activity

Ask participants to spend at least 15 minutes reviewing the resources identified in this module that provide examples of collaborative learning in practice as well as strategies and methods. Next, have them consider a segment or set of learning objectives in their course that would be well suited for collaborative learning, and spend another 15 minutes designing an instructional

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*ELI Discovery Tools are practical resources designed to support the development and implementation of teaching, learning, and technology projects or processes on campus. This unit is part of the **EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Discovery Tool: Collaborative Learning Workshop Guide**. Each unit can be used as a stand-alone activity, or all units can be combined for a multiday learning event. The units typically include articles, discussion exercises, and questionnaires. You are welcome to add your own material or modify what you find. The complete Collaborative Learning tool set is available at [www.educause.edu/eli/collaborativelearning](http://www.educause.edu/eli/collaborativelearning).*

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## Unit 5

collaborative learning activity paying particular attention to any setup or training requirements, assessment, learning outcomes, and potential technologies. Once the activity is designed, group team participants with others in the same or related discipline and ask them to share the following:

- Brief overview of the activity—short abstract that summarizes the activity's strategy.
- Desired learning outcomes—identify the learning objectives for the activity and consider how these will be communicated to students.
- Strategy for “setting up” the activity, e.g., pre-work, team building required, and so forth—What work might students be asked to do so that they are prepared to begin the collaborative activity, i.e., reading, quiz, writing? What tools can the instructor use to determine if students are ready?
- Strategy for assessing the activity—How will student work be assessed: individually, by team, by role, by work product?
- Anticipated issues or challenges—What difficulties might the instructor or students encounter while working on a collaborative project: workload issues, meeting deadlines, combining their individual pieces into one, work distribution, and so forth? What can be done to address these issues proactively?

To conclude this activity, you might ask a few participants to share on each of the areas above or to share in groups of two to three. Depending on the size of the group, you might also post a summary of the activities to a wiki so that the group can share ideas, teaching strategies, and solutions.

### Student Teams and Collaborative Learning

The use of student teams can be an especially effective teaching strategy for several reasons. First, it allows the instructor to support students in learning a valuable skill that employers continually rank as critical to workplace success: how to work together and support each other in learning and discovery. Second, becoming effective and productive team members allows students to develop their independent learning skills by working individually on a portion of a group project that makes them accountable not only to the instructor but also to team members. And finally, integrating teamwork into a course can result in adding structure to out-of-class time and increasing student accountability for their learning. Obviously, team-based learning is not appropriate for all content, but it can usually be adopted in some form in any course.

Larry Michaelsen (Team Based Learning, [http://teambasedlearning.apsc.ubc.ca/?page\\_id=9](http://teambasedlearning.apsc.ubc.ca/?page_id=9)), a business professor at the University of Central Missouri, finds that successful student teams are built around three components: promotion of ongoing accountability, linked and mutually reinforcing assignments, and practices that stimulate idea exchange. Students must be accountable for both in-class and out-of-class work; the learning that takes place in class must be reinforced and well integrated into the out-of-class activities; and, finally, students must be actively engaged in the entire course.

The strategies and tools discussed below can dramatically improve student-learning outcomes in team-based learning.

### Team Contracts

Contracts can be used in instruction in a variety of forms, but they are especially useful in working with student teams and long-term projects. Once student teams have been formed, consider asking the team to develop a contract that includes the following items:

- Purpose, goal, and mission of the team—what the team will accomplish
- Expectations for the team as a whole as well as for individual members
- Roles for each individual
- Conflict-resolution strategies to employ when the team encounters disagreements, doesn't meet deadlines, or doesn't deliver on milestones
- Meeting schedules, locations, agendas, and minutes
- Communication strategies: e-mail, phone, in-person
- Decision-making policy: consensus, majority rules, other
- Project plan: deadlines, objectives, activities, and so forth

The task of developing a team contract is something that can be introduced in class and then completed on students' own time outside class. Contracts can then be signed with copies distributed to the faculty member and members of the team. However it's done, developing contracts for teamwork can be highly effective in proactively addressing some of the most frequently experienced team issues, from identifying times across busy schedules to establishing ground rules for discussion and debate. Michaelsen also suggests guidelines for creating and maintaining successful teams:<sup>1</sup>

- Assigning roles
- Using permanent groups
- Allowing some in-class group work
- Placing students in groups that have between four and seven members
- Carefully and clearly outlining learning goals for the teams
- Spending time to teach team development skills
- Providing clear and detailed instructions for deliverables
- Providing rubrics for students to evaluate their deliverables before submitting them
- Purposely selecting and applying concepts from the course to be addressed in the teams

### Team-Based Learning Video Demonstrations

Michaelsen's videos (see <http://teambasedlearning.apsc.ubc.ca/v/michaelsenvid.html>) are extremely useful in understanding and also demonstrating to students the way in which teams evolve and become productive. At the conclusion of the team-based learning segment, ask participants how the team-based learning approach or parts of the approach might fit their course. Participants could be given a few moments to consider this teaching and learning strategy and then could be asked to share their concerns (pedagogic, logistic, time), support needs, and modified approaches to team-based learning in small groups or in the larger group while one member captures the comments on a wiki or flip chart.

Collaborative learning and the community building that it supports can greatly enhance the student experience. When community exists in the course, students are more committed to the content and the activities surrounding the content; are more comfortable asking questions;

## Unit 5

ultimately become more actively involved in their learning; and are more likely to complete the course. Through a variety of collaborative activities, starting early and persisting throughout the course, participants can foster and encourage community, collaboration, and team building among their students.

### Focus Session Resources

- All Collaborative Learning Focus Session Proceedings: <http://net.educause.edu/Proceedings/1022124>.
- *Project Parlors: A Lightning Round of Innovative Projects in Interdisciplinary Collaboration*, Roger Debo, North Carolina State University; Michael Reese, Johns Hopkins University; Cyprien Lomas, Kathryn Gretsinger, and Andrew Riseman, University of British Columbia, <https://admin.na3.acrobat.com/a729300474/p25185337/>.
- *Building Campus-Wide Collaborative Relationships to Support Innovation and Maximize Achievement*, Beth Martin, Christine Lupton, and Lauren Shawl, University of Wisconsin–Madison, <https://admin.na3.acrobat.com/a729300474/p73404814/>.

### Readings

- Assessment and Collaborative Learning: <http://bit.ly/d3dEy5>.
- Four Collaborative Learning Strategies: <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgmt/c-learn/strategies.html>.
- Collaborative Learning Structures Strategies and Techniques: <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgmt/c-learn/methods.html>.
- Collaborative Learning: <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgmt/c-learn/index.html>.
- University of Wisconsin–Madison's Engage Program: <http://engage.wisc.edu/collaboration/index.html>.
- Team Contract Sample 1: [http://pheatt.emporia.edu/CCSC\\_ARCHIVE/ccsc2007presentations/managing\\_student\\_projects/ccsc-TeamContract.doc](http://pheatt.emporia.edu/CCSC_ARCHIVE/ccsc2007presentations/managing_student_projects/ccsc-TeamContract.doc).
- Team Contract Sample 2: [http://www.augsburg.edu/ppages/~schwalbe/team\\_contract.doc](http://www.augsburg.edu/ppages/~schwalbe/team_contract.doc).
- Team Contract Sample 3: <http://math.arizona.edu/~sgfoster/115b/teamcontb.doc>.

### Endnote

1. See <http://teambasedlearning.apsc.ubc.ca/>.