

## **Team-Based Learning: Group work that works transcript**

Narrator: Even in large classes with fixed seating, team-based learning motivates students to high levels of attendance, preparation, participation, and critical thinking. But team-based learning is not any old form of active learning or group work. In team-based learning, students engage course content at an applied level, motivated by both task design and incentive structures to spend time on a task, gathering input from all their teammates.

Four practical elements of team-based learning prepare and motivate students for this high level of engagement. The first is strategically-formed permanent teams. Decide what student characteristics would make it easier or more difficult for a student to do well in your class, and ensure that these characteristics are spread as fairly as possible across teams.

Mihran Aroian – Business: So how can we create a team that's going to be balanced in terms of, you know, the characteristics of the students in the class? By having all of the students at the beginning of the semester, you know, take a, um, survey and basically answer a set of questions that would then help us to kind of group them. And, uh, so we built up a spreadsheet of teams that we could then, um, assign students to. So when we come to class, up on the big doc cam, I have a kind of a seating arrangement set up of the entire classroom and where your team is supposed to be sitting.

Penne Restad – History: The way that I constructed them was to make them as diverse as possible. These teams are six, seven members each. And these teams are permanent. So, they don't shift. This is who you belong to. And you sink or swim. And I'm hoping swim together.

Nate Sokolski – American Studies Major: Our group was really diverse. You know, we had three seniors, two freshmen. Everyone is a different major. No one knew each other going

into to it. You know, when you come together, it was pretty interesting to us all become friends at the end of it.

Narrator: The second element of team-based learning is a sequence of activities that takes place at the beginning of each unit of the course. This sequence is called the Readiness Assurance Process, because it assures the students are ready to move forward into high level application of the material. Having completed assigned readings, students first take an individual test over them. Then they take the exact same test again as a team, coming to consensus on their team answers. They get immediate feedback on their team test, after which they can write appeals if they figure they can make a case for their answers which were marked as incorrect.

Penne Restad: To guide them, um, I've created a reading guide with some general questions and then some specific terms that I want them to look for. Having read the books and looked over the guide and reasonably comfortable, at least that they've read the information, they come to class the first day, and they take a quiz, 20 points multiple choice. Then, uh, after they've done that, I put them in the groups. Each team retakes the same quiz, and they have a scratch off.

Marc Bizer – French: I distribute these scratch cards. And then I break the students into their groups, and they go through the questions as a group. And they decide what the answer should be, and then they scratch off what they think the answer should be. And if the answer is correct, then they see a little asterisk.

Student 1: I'm not scratching until I get approval from everyone.

Student 2: Okay 34, we said A. C'mon, A! That's wrong. So now, we're going with D?

Student 3: How is it D?

Student 2: \*inaudible\*

Jeff Jacobus – Engineering Major: With a scratch off thing, I actually liked the way that worked because you had to keep going until you got it right. And so it, you couldn't just, like, miss it and say oh forget it, we didn't get it. You know, you kind of had to okay well, if this isn't the case, now what?

Alex Albright – Law: When I walk, around it is just astounding to hear these students arguing over fine points of Texas civil procedure. They point out to each other, well this is what this rule says, well this comment in this rule says something else. And how do you put those together?

Marc Bizer: And I've never heard anyone say ahh, you know, I told you it was be and you overrode what I said! Um, it's kind of remarkable in that way. I found it seems very collaborative and not competitive.

Nate Sokolski: There's one guy who is really, really smart in our group and there was one question where we all had the same answer, and he had a different one. I think we went through like almost every answer except his and at the end he was right. And you know, it's just because he didn't speak up. Next time it got around, he made sure, he's like listen, I remember this. You know, this happened because of this. I'm pretty sure this is right. We're like, I think we owe you one. So, you know, we trusted him. It was right. And that was the best part about it, just kind of involving everyone.

Narrator: At the end of the Readiness Assurance Process, if teams feel they can argue in support of any of their answers that were marked incorrect, they can generate written appeals, which must consist of a clear statement of argument, supported by specific evidence from the readings.

Penne Restad: if I wrote a question that's poorly worded, if it's ambiguous, they can rewrite it. Or if I just put the wrong answer, they can go into their book, write out this is the correct answer on this page and they have to cite the evidence.

Marc Bizer: they seem to work well together. And again, it's a real team spirit-building exercise.

Narrator: The Readiness Assurance Process is followed by a clarifying lecture, in which the teacher can focus specifically upon what the team scores indicate the students have not yet grasped. The third element of team-based learning consists of application activities, in which students must make decisions to solve discipline-based problems, often using case studies, realistic data, or other specific examples of materials from your field. These activities work best when they incorporate four elements that all begin with the letter "S." First, problems must be significant in a sense of demonstrating a concept's usefulness. Second, groups should be required to use course concepts to make a specific choice. For example, which procedure is best to implement in a given situation, and why? Or from a certain article, what is the best piece of evidence in support of an argument, and why? Third, all teams should work on the same problem, case, or question so they will care about decisions other groups made and their rationales. Fourth, if possible, groups should report choices simultaneously, so differences in group conclusions can be explored immediately.

Mihran Aroian: This semester I taught one class with 345 students in it. Oftentimes where the case is, you know, there's not necessarily a right answer or wrong answer, it's you know, how it is that you reach the particular decision that you reach. What were the steps that you went through in order to reach the conclusion that you reached? So I used the iClicker

technology to be able to gauge where the students are at any given time in terms of what they're thinking about the case.

Penne Restad: There's emphasis on, you have to learn a certain number of facts. But more, I'm interested in them learning the process of thinking through history, how to think like a historian does. The way I've done this is to create kind of a large sheet, an 11 x 17 sheet that has, um, kind of steps that one needs to go through, to think about this answer. Each of these documents basically is steps to writing a good essay. So I had agree or disagree, Cold War fears were justified, and taking this from the historian's viewpoint, and so agree/disagree. Write a very short explanation. So the idea is to take them sequentially through a series of thought.

Jeff Jacobus: It was about the New Deal. And it was, if you had to summarize it in one sentence, and we had one sentence here, one sentence here, pick which one you thought was more accurate. And then you take that one and compare it to another sentence. Which one's more accurate? Then take the winner of that one, like a tournament kind of. And so you end up with the one sentence you like the best at the end. And we found that one was kind of hard, just because, like, you want to take part of this sentence and part of this sentence and part of this sentence and put it all together in your own thing, which we had to do at the end.

Penne Restad: We could say this about them that's negative. We could say this about them that's positive. And then write some sort of summary statement that tries to give some more nuanced meaning.

Nate Sokolski: And then we'd go up, and each one of us, like, we weren't, we wouldn't go up and present but we could give our big sheets. She could put it on the projector and each one of us could have a different take on it.

Alex Albright: This is a great exercise, because they are using the rules to dissect a statement and make an argument one way or the other.

Student 4: my reasoning is that once the court makes a new judgment, so like, once that motion is filed, it's possible to go 90 days.

Alex Albright: It's wonderful lawyering technique. The way I've always taught it before team-based learning was stand up lecture, students are half asleep. I couldn't tell if they were good lawyers or not, because they sat there and didn't talk very much. So I'm impressed with my class. I now know my class are good lawyers.

Narrator: A group becomes a team when members not only feel accountable to an outside authority, but also feel accountable to one another. Therefore, the last element of team-based learning is student to student teammate feedback. Halfway through the term and again at the end, students are required to give one another brief pieces of group participation feedback. In many cases, this takes the form of students expressing for each teammate one thing they appreciate and one thing they request. These are given to the teacher, or TA, who then processes them and emails each student a compilation of what their teammates appreciate about and request from them as teammates.

Penne Restad: Lots of them said what I request of you is keep up the good work. So that's nice in itself. Um, others of them say things like, you have such good ideas, I wish you'd come to class more. One student, I remember, people said you contribute so much to this group, but you have a negative attitude. And every single person on the teams said but you have a negative attitude. These are things I can't tell students. I can't walk up to a student and say clean up that attitude. It just doesn't work.

Marc Bizer: The professorial role is an extension of the parental role in a way. And I think it tends to incite a kind of rebelliousness; it can't help but do that. And it seems to me that when another student tells another student you need to come to class more, it's more of a friendly basis I think, like a brother, or if you want to use the family model, more like a brother or sister than a parent.

Narrator: With the four essential elements of strategically-formed permanent teams, Readiness Assurance, well-designed application activities, and peer evaluations in place, you'll be ready to encounter more motivated, engaged, collaborative critical thinkers in your classroom than you may have thought possible.

Marc Bizer: I do know in the past, when I didn't use the team-based learning, students didn't like working in groups, or a lot of them didn't. they would say I don't like hearing from my classmates. I want to hear from the professor. And I don't get that feedback anymore. So that's huge.

Nate Sokolski: It forces you to work that hard. It forces you to put in the effort where every day, you're going to be there. Every day you're going to be ready. And every day you're going to get paired because people are relying on you to be prepared and be there.

Alex Albright: They're learning more, um, I'm learning more. I know more about what they understand and what they don't understand.

Jeff Jacobus: I had a lecture class last semester, and I had this team-based learning class this semester. I thought this class was 10 times better than the last one. I felt like I learned more, came to class more, read more, everything, you know. It's enjoyable. It really made history... I really am not a big fan of history at all, but I really enjoyed this class.