OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Knowing how to work in a collaborative, productive team is an important future ready skill. To build this skill, students can work in teams for a short lesson or an activity, a group assignment, or a major PBL project. To many students, however–and many adults–it does not come naturally. It's often downright challenging!

Many of us know what it's like to be on a team that does not function well, and students may have had similar experiences. Some team members may not do their fair share of the work. Some students want to take control of the group, or don't know *how* to collaborate. Some are late for meetings or don't get tasks done on time. And sometimes, teammates can be disrespectful to others, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Teachers can support the development of collaboration skills through direct instruction and modeling, providing scaffolding such as a collaboration rubric, and by coaching students as they work. Another useful strategy is to have students set norms or agreements about how they want to work together, then reflect on how well they're being followed. For shorter lessons, activities, and tasks, the team might only reflect once, at the end, and consider what they did well and what they could improve on next time. In a longer assignment or a PBL project, students should reflect at regular checkpoints to assess if the team is on the right track, or if they need to change what they're doing or get support from the teacher.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Setting Team Norms
GRADES: 4-12
TIME: 15-20 minutes

PURPOSE: To build collaboration skills by establishing shared agreements for how a team will work together.

OVERVIEW

In this activity, the teacher facilitates a process for students to create their own team agreements. It would occur after teams have been formed and before they start to work together. A team-builder or other activity to get to know each other would also be a good idea before this activity.

Although classroom norms might already exist, it's important for each team to discuss and agree on their own particular set. The process is a team-builder in itself, and the sense of shared ownership will make it more likely the team will follow their norms. Students may wish to draw from the classroom norms and that's OK, but some additions and variations among teams is expected and encouraged.

STEPS

1. Discuss the purpose of setting team norms (or call them agreements, if you prefer). If your students are already familiar with classroom norms and agreements, this can just be a brief reminder. If this idea is new to them, you might explain that:
    a. Norms/agreements are statements about how each team member is expected to work with the team (give an example).
    b. Norms/agreements are not like rules coming from the teacher; they come from students/team members.
    c. Norms/agreements help a team work more effectively and get along together.
    d. Norms/agreements help make sure everyone feels respected and that their voice will be heard.
    e. (For older students) Norms/team agreements are used in the world of work by high-functioning teams, to help them be more productive and improve their collaboration skills.

2. Students individually reflect for a few minutes and do a quick-write, listing a few norms they think would work for the team. You could prompt them to list words and phrases that describe an "ideal teammate."

3. Students share what they wrote with their team. Each member could read aloud one item on their list, going around the group until everything has been shared. They may want to record all the items on a piece of chart paper or shared digital document.

4. Teams discuss similarities and differences among their lists, and why they think particular items are important.

5. Teams reach agreement on 3-5 items they can all commit to. Remind them NOT to decide by a simple majority vote, because that can lead the "losers" to not want to follow the agreements. If you've already taught students a group decision-making process to arrive at a consensus, make sure they use it–or teach it now. Some example processes are:
    a. "Fist to Five" – Students hold up their fingers to show how much they like each item, with 1= not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = it's OK, 4 = it's good, 5 = it's great. The team records the total scores for each item. Then, the team checks to see which items scored highest, discusses the results, and agrees on a final list. Students who feel strongly about whether to include a particular norm should speak up and explain why, so the team can consider it.
    b. Each student puts a dot or star on the chart paper next to the 3-4 norms they like most. After seeing which items have the most dots, the team discusses the results, and agrees on a final list. Students who feel strongly about whether to

include a particular norm should speak up and explain why, so the team can consider it.

6. Each team records their final list of norms, either on paper or a shared digital document. (If on paper, each member of the team should write them down and keep them in a place where they can be referred to regularly. A "Master Copy" could be saved by one member.) Consider asking each team to read their list aloud to the class.

7. Explain that each team will check in on their norms after a lesson or activity, or at regular checkpoints during a longer project. They will reflect on how well they followed/are following their norms, and what to do differently if they did/are not. Note that on longer projects, a team may decide it needs to change, remove, or add a norm to their list.

8. Close the activity by debriefing the process. Ask students to share out how it went, what they did well, what challenges they faced and how they handled them, etc. Ask if any team would like more time or support for creating their list of norms, and decide when and how this will be provided.

NOTES

- As students are talking with their teams and making decisions, move around the room to monitor the activity. Support any student or team that needs it. Check to be sure the norms are being selected carefully, appropriate, and written clearly.
- Collect a copy of each team's norms, or be sure you have access to a digital document. Review these (if you have not already seen them during the activity) to be sure the norms are appropriate and written clearly. Give feedback to any team you think needs to reconsider or revise their norms.