



LESSONS IN THIS SERIES

- Overview of Project Based Learning
- Getting Started
- Balancing the Assessment
- ➡ Teamwork Tips
- Managing the PBL Experience
- Wrapping Up

“ Cooperation is the thorough conviction that nobody can get there unless everybody gets there.

Virginia Burden

TEAMWORK TIPS

TEAMS VS GROUPS

Imagine two groups of people on a hockey rink, all wearing skates and carrying a hockey stick. Someone drops a puck and the game is on. But no one is playing a position; one group has four goalies, the other has none, and everyone else is just skating around. How effective would the groups be in scoring a goal?

A hockey team, on the other hand, has assigned positions or roles. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing; they rely upon and trust each other to do it. They encourage each other and have each others' back.

Students are sometimes put together in groups and expected to work as teams with little or no understanding of what that means or practice/coaching in doing it. Oftentimes you will see one student frustratedly doing all the work, or one student sitting apart from the rest of their group, completely disengaged, because they have been excluded or there really wasn't enough work for the group to do. (It just doesn't take five students to make a poster!) Some students absolutely hate to do any group work because they have had these experiences.

Skill in collaboration and teamwork, including conflict resolution skills, is one of the most important skills for success in life. A PBL experience is a perfect opportunity to teach this soft skill to students who are new to working effectively in teams. Researching solutions to complex problems, brainstorming ideas, and preparing a public presentation is purposefully challenging and a daunting task for one individual. Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success!

ASSIGNING TEAMS

Depending upon the maturity and PBL experience of your students, it might be best for you to assign the PBL teams. Set them up for success! Since each member of a team brings unique skills, knowledge, and experience to the team, a strengths assessment will allow you to distribute individual talents as evenly as possible. A strengths questionnaire completed by each student will help you with that task. See example on next page.

Note that the person in each role on the team is responsible to make sure that the work in their area is completed but is not necessarily going to complete all that work by themselves. Everyone can and should help with the graphics, writing, researching, organization, technical aspects, etc. during teamwork.

If you have one or two students left over after you make your teams, you can assign them to a team as an extra member in a co- or new role. Or, you could make a short-staffed team by having someone double-up on role responsibility. This is a great opportunity for differentiation and inclusionary practice!

CO-CONSTRUCT THE RULES

Have a full class discussion to introduce teamwork and to co-construct the rules for working as a team on the PBL. Here are a few possible points to get your discussion started.

1. Each team member is responsible for his or her own behavior and learning.

2. Each team member should be willing to help any other team member who asks for help.
3. You may only ask your teacher for help when all members of the team have the same question.
4. It is critical to work, think about, and engage in the work that you are asked to do. Any time that you think your team is done with the task you were asked to do, immediately find me wherever I am in the classroom and send a member of your team over to tell me that you think you are done with the task. I will confirm that you have completed it.
5. You will often be asked to work quietly by yourself on a problem in preparation for working with your team. This is so that you can develop confidence in your abilities to tackle problems alone. Whenever possible, this will be followed by an opportunity to share your work with your teammates and to get help from them where you need it.

TEAM CONTRACTS

Once teams have been established and the rules for teamwork have been co-constructed, it is time for team members to establish clear expectations for who will do what by reviewing and signing a team contract. Take the time to discuss contract terms with each team. It is important to discuss what will happen if things go wrong (and they will) while everyone is still on speaking terms!

CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL BUILDER

Great teams have great communication and conflict resolution skills. When students feel hurt and become angry because of something someone else has done or hasn't done, most times they confront each other with accusations in ways that escalate conflict and make the situation worse. Statements that point blame usually begin with "You" and focus on the other person in a highly judgmental and negative way. On the other hand, statements that begin with "I feel" focus on our own feelings in response to the other person's behavior. Teach students strategies to resolve conflict before it happens.

An example exercise for building skills in conflict resolution is provided on the right.

TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES

For some students, the concept of belonging to an organized team will be entirely new; therefore, basic teamwork skills must be explicitly taught and encouraged. If this applies to your students, you may consider a team-building or consensus-building exercise as a fun way to begin. A Google search will return thousands of ideas for activities that range from very quick and simple to more complex and time-consuming. Choose one that fits the "personality" of your class, their collective team experience level, and time constraints.

MANAGING TEAMS

Keep a close eye on team dynamics as they work through the PBL and be prepared to revisit the team contract as required. Sit with each team frequently to get a closer perspective of their progress. Consider having regular check-ins with team leaders.

RESOURCES

Strengths Questionnaire: [Example](#)

Team Contract: [Example](#)

Conflict Resolution Skill Builder: [Example](#)

[The Afterschool Guide for Creating Outstanding Team Building Games](#)

LYNN AND CHUCK'S EXCELLENT (PBL) ADVENTURE

Lynn and Chuck next talk about the teamwork aspect of the PBL. Many of their students play sports on organized teams so they expect the majority of the class will get the hockey analogy of the difference between a group of skaters with a puck and a hockey team. We're Canadian after all, eh?! They decide to leave out a team building activity but to talk it through with their class instead.

During their class discussion about teamwork, Lynn and Chuck plan to introduce the NB Global Competency [Collaboration](#) doc, co-construct the team rules, and do a [conflict resolution skill builder](#) activity.

The teachers also decide to use a [strengths questionnaire](#) to help them assign roles to team members so that everyone doesn't try to play the goalie. The only issue they can foresee with assigning teams right now is that there are only 19 students in the class, and since they were planning on making teams of 4, one team will be short a member.

To be continued...