



Getting Started With Team-Based Learning

Sibley, Jim; and Ostafichuk, Peter
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Book Review

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Team-based learning (TBL) was developed over thirty years ago in response to challenges posed by students coming to class unprepared as well as the need for students to apply their knowledge to authentic and complex real-world problems. In this book, Sibley, Ostafichuk, and their contributing authors offer an overview and introduction to TBL for faculty who want to get started with this model of teaching and learning. Filled with vignettes of successes and failures by faculty who have used TBL, the book concludes with appendices of resources, a variety of options to use in the classroom for implementing TBL activities, and reflections on the challenges of implementing TBL in teaching. The book is helpfully divided into three sections.

Section one begins with an overview of TBL by introducing its four essential elements: (1) creating properly formed and managed permanent teams; (2) developing a readiness assurance process (RAP) to ensure motivated and prepared students; (3) using application activities which require students to use course concepts and skills; and (4) holding students accountable for their own learning. With this model of instruction the focus is shifted away from the professor to students who actively use what they have learned to solve problems. The next two chapters focus on ways to design and implement a TBL course. Roberson and Franchini's approach to design is to begin in the middle by designing the team application activities and tasks that allow students to practice using the disciplinary concepts of the course and thus demonstrate their learning. The final chapter in the opening section (by Kubitz) provides a literature review of studies which documents the effectiveness of TBL and connects the model to a variety of learning theories (Vygotsky, Brunner, Perry, and Zull).

The heart of the book is found in section two with chapters which elaborate on the four

essential elements of TBL introduced earlier. Each chapter is full of practical advice and vignettes from faculty who have utilized TBL. The authors discuss, for example, the different stages of the RAP - selecting appropriate quality readings (they recommend shorter rather longer assignments), developing individual readiness assessment and team assessment tests, offering practical advice about writing good multiple choice questions and developing reading guides to assist student preparation. The key to a successful TBL course is found in the application activities which engage students' interests. When it works, the authors argue that student focus shifts from "what is the right answer?" to discussions about "why?" and the supporting evidence. They offer a number of ways in which students may simultaneously report on the decisions made about the same problem they are working on. Courses should be designed in such a way that students are accountable and rewarded not only for their individual performances, but also for contributions to the team and overall team performance.

The authors argue that for TBL to be effective, it is best to use it for an entire course rather than use it piecemeal. The book is full of practical advice, however, which is well-grounded in literature about teaching and learning so that faculty members who are hesitant to transform a course to TBL can still benefit from reading (advice such as how to write effective multiple choice questions and how to facilitate discussions). I should note that the vignettes and examples in the book from faculty who have used TBL include no one from Religious Studies. But after reviewing the book, I am motivated to try this model in my teaching.

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