

Classroom Connections (Teaming)

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THE TASK OF TEAMING

Last spring we published an issue of *Classroom Connections* that talked about the “Art of Teaming.” As educators, we all understand that team development is an evolutionary process, so in this issue we purposely talk about it again, specifically what happens when teachers take teaming from idea to implementation. The days of forming teams are practically over. Nearly every educator in schools today has been through that process. The question that remains is: How do we encourage participation, deal with negative attitudes, and make team time productive? We describe below some common traps teams experience and offer ideas for turning things around. But, when you really feel defeated, remember that teaming doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time and tenacity.

THE STUMBLING BLOCKS OF TEAMING

- Some teams do not spend time dealing with real issues and real solutions.
- Team time, at times, equals a waste of time.
- Not all members of a team share the workload and responsibility.
- Some team members look for opportunities to cancel team meetings instead of staying on schedule.
- Grading papers during team time is considered acceptable. After all, when else can you do it?
- Too much time is spent on trivial details.
- There is no structure for team meetings.

TACTICS TO KEEP YOUR TEAM ON TRACK

- Consider team time as a sacred time - it’s not for grading papers.
- Insist that team meetings are never canceled or postponed—only if there is a critical reason for doing so.
- Create an agenda that focuses on three main topics—students, curriculum, and tasks you need to complete.
- Rotate the responsibility of being the team leader at least annually. Some teams rotate their leader every semester. This allows for everyone to share the load and learn team organization and management.
- Assign tasks to each team member and give due dates for all tasks. This allows the leader to hold all team members accountable.
- Talk about curriculum issues in every team meeting. Go beyond sharing what you are teaching. Bring in examples of what you are planning to do with your students. Teach a lesson to your team. This is a great way to evaluate and get feedback to help you improve your lesson plans. You and your team have a common goal, so their advice is some of the best you’ll get.
- Bring samples of student work to each team meeting. Share strategies you used to motivate students. Describe the topic and tasks required. Talk about whether students worked individually or in groups. Did they have a choice? Mention the work process—where the students sat in the classroom and how much time it took to complete the assignment. You can gather great information on how to help students succeed by sharing and discussing the instructional process in your classroom. Just think of how much more productive your meetings would be if you focused on the important issues like student success.



- Deal with classroom discipline issues as a team. Share strategies you have used that have successfully curbed bad behavior. For example, you might have spent one-on-one time with a misbehaving student to describe directions for an assignment. This technique might have helped the student comprehend what she needed to accomplish. Or maybe you changed your seating format and project pairings to deal with disruption issues.

TAKING YOUR TEAM'S TEMPERATURE: EVALUATING PROGRESS AND BUILDING COHESIVENESS

Suggest surveys as a way to share thoughts with your team members. Use the sample survey below or adjust it to suit your team. Another great method of gathering information about each other is to take some wacky surveys that do not relate to school-wide issues. For example, several magazines are famous for their quirky surveys. They may ask personal questions, but they are worth a good laugh and can help build bonds among your team members.

TURNING THE LENS ON YOUR TEAM

Have everyone on your team take this quick survey, then collect the answers and share them with the group. You can pick more than one answer.

1. What strengths do you bring to your team?
 - a. I am always prepared for team meetings.
 - b. I share my opinion even when not asked.
 - c. I have been or am currently the team leader.
 - d. I volunteer to complete necessary team tasks.
 - e. I show up for team meetings with a forced smile.
2. Describe your team.
 - a. We meet everyday—no exceptions.
 - b. We only meet when food is provided.
 - c. We never meet for more than 20 minutes a day.
 - d. Team time is enjoyable.
 - e. Members of the team look for ways not to attend the meeting.
3. Fill in the blank. My teammates make me _____
 - a. want to come to meetings.
 - b. want to call in sick.
 - c. try to do a better job.
 - d. want to work harder.
 - e. frustrated.
4. What new strategies has your team tried in the last school year?
5. What frustrates you about your team meetings?
6. What three new ideas or strategies should your team try next year?



7. What three things can you do to make your team move in a better direction?
8. If you could create an agenda for your team what items would you include?
9. If you could tell your teammates three things what would they be?
10. Do you think teaming is critical to the success of your students? Why?

Which of the following strategies has your team used in the last two weeks? (Check your answers.)

- Brought food to a meeting
- Stayed on task for the entire meeting
- Used an agenda
- Looked at student work
- Contacted parents
- Evaluated a team member's lesson
- Changed the meeting schedule
- Invited a student to discuss an issue during our team time
- Used consensus to solve an issue
- Assigned tasks to other team members
- Dealt with a team conflict
- Provided support to a team member
- Planned a unit or discussed curriculum

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you can see, there are many things teams need to do. Our best advice is to start dealing with what is important and what will really make a difference for your students. Teaming is designed to increase academic achievement and allows educators to solve problems together—so, maximize your time. Don't waste team meetings on trivial issues that frustrate you and your teammates. Solve problems, seek advice, mentor each other, talk to students, organize curriculum, and most of all, celebrate with each other!

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