

I TBL is a collection of practices that support one another for powerful instructional effect. This chapter describes the building blocks of team-based learning and the steps necessary to put them into place.

The Essential Elements of Team-Based Learning

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Team-based learning (TBL) possibly relies on small group interaction more heavily than any other commonly used instructional strategy in postsecondary education (for comparative discussion of different approaches, see Fink, 2004; Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 2007; Millis and Cottell, 1998). This conclusion is based on three facts. First, with TBL, group work is central to exposing students to and improving their ability to apply course content. Second, with TBL, the vast majority of class time is used for group work. Third, courses taught with TBL typically involve multiple group assignments that are designed to improve learning and promote the development of self-managed learning teams.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of TBL. Next, we discuss the four essential elements of TBL and then walk through the steps required to implement them. Finally, we examine some of the benefits that students, administrators, and faculty can expect from a successful implementation of TBL.

A Broad Overview of TBL

The primary learning objective in TBL is to go beyond simply covering content and focus on ensuring that students have the opportunity to practice using course concepts to solve problems. Thus, TBL is designed to provide students with both conceptual and procedural knowledge. Although some time in the TBL classroom is spent ensuring that students master the course

content, the vast majority of class time is used for team assignments that focus on using course content to solve the kinds of problems that students are likely to face in the future. Figure 1.1 outlines generally how time in one unit of a TBL course is organized.

In a TBL course, students are strategically organized into permanent groups for the term, and the course content is organized into major units—typically five to seven. Before any in-class content work, students must study assigned materials because each unit begins with the readiness assurance process (RAP). The RAP consists of a short test on the key ideas from the readings that students complete as individuals; then they take the same test again as a team, coming to consensus on team answers. Students receive immediate feedback on the team test and then have the opportunity to write evidence-based appeals if they feel they can make valid arguments for their answer to questions that they got wrong. The final step in the RAP is a lecture (usually very short and always very specific) to enable the instructor to clarify any misperceptions that become apparent during the team test and the appeals.

Once the RAP is completed, the remainder (and the majority) of the learning unit is spent on in-class activities and assignments that require students to practice using the course content.

The Four Essential Elements of Team-Based Learning

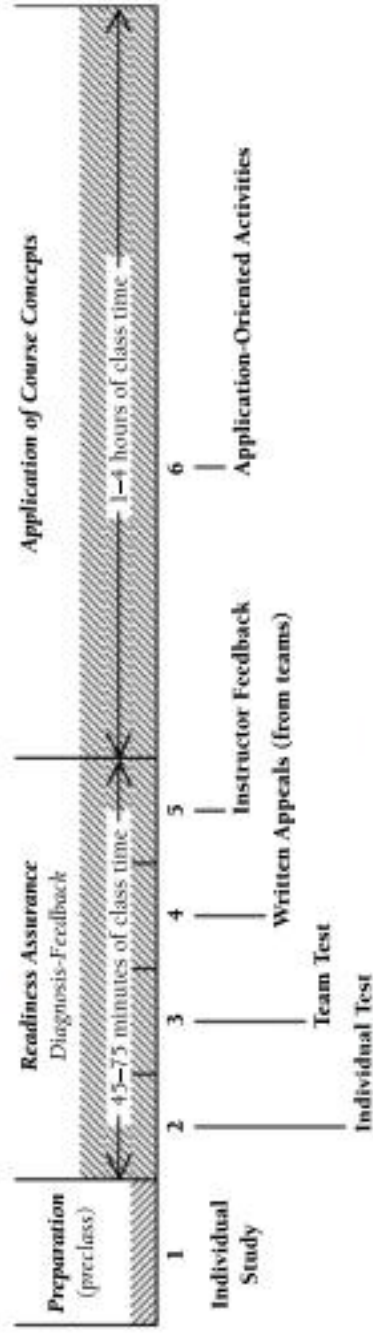
Shifting from simply familiarizing students with course concepts to requiring that students use those concepts to solve problems is no small task. Making this shift requires changes in the roles of both instructor and students. The instructor's primary role shifts from dispensing information to designing and managing the overall instructional process, and the students' role shifts from being passive recipients of information to one of accepting responsibility for the initial exposure to the course content so that they will be prepared for the in-class teamwork.

Changes of this magnitude do not happen automatically and may even seem to be a dream rather than an achievable reality. They are, however, achievable when the four essential elements of TBL are successfully implemented:

- **Groups.** Groups must be properly formed and managed.
- **Accountability.** Students must be accountable for the quality of their individual and group work.
- **Feedback.** Students must receive frequent and timely feedback.
- **Assignment design.** Group assignments must promote both learning and team development.

When these four elements are implemented in a course, the stage is set for student groups to evolve into cohesive learning teams.

Figure 1.1. Team-Based Instructional Activity Sequence



Note: This sequence is repeated for each major instructional unit—typically five to seven per course.