

# Reviews / Comptes rendus

## Team-based Learning in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Group Work to Generate Critical Thinking and Engagement

*edited by Michael Sweet and Larry K. Michaelsen  
(Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012, 319 pages)*

It is always a pleasure to read and review a book that resonates with one's own professional "touchstones" and this work did not disappoint. The mantra, "it is essential we provide the lifelong learning and work skills to prepare learners to be effective in collaborative group work contexts they will undoubtedly find themselves [in]," can elicit collective bobbing nods of agreement from almost any audience of educators. Combine this imperative with the timeless need to explicitly integrate critical thinking and learner engagement into our curricula and you will, undoubtedly, rouse even the most somnolent to rise to their feet, applauding. This book, edited by Michael Sweet and Larry Michaelsen succeeds in elegantly dovetailing these elements and in the process "gets our attention" with its emphasis on practical applications—moving theory into practice.

The primary focus of this work, namely, the articulation of effective team-based learning (TBL) processes that have at their core the goals of actualizing the development of critical thinking skills and dynamic learner engagement, is more than laudable; it is critically important. Contemporary learners, awash in a virtual, unending flood of information, need "cognitive levees" (critical thinking skills being just one) to build knowledge; those charged with responsibilities to effectively facilitate peak learning can implement some or all of the principles outlined in this book to help them do just that.

The book has two sections: "Foundations" and "Voices of Experience." "Foundations" lays down a coherent and accessible foundation of concepts and principles, the core of the system of team-based critical thinking and engagement processes. The first chapter of this section, "Critical Thinking and Engagement: Creating Cognitive Apprenticeships with Team-Based Learning," written by the editors, is well worth the "price of admission" since it outlines the historical development of the key ideas addressed in the book, buttressed by a thorough grounding in definitions, theory, and applications. Throughout, useful figures summarize and support a comprehensive handling of the core elements of the approach. Importantly, the authors do a thorough job of outlining what they call "the RAP" (no, not the musical genre) rather "readiness assurance process," which includes individual preparation for a unit, followed by an individual test, a team test with immediate feedback, written appeals, and final clarification as needed. The claim is that this teaching and learning process first, "holds students accountable as individuals

to acquire an understanding of the material" and second, "holds teams accountable for having worked together to construct a shared understanding of the material" for the ultimate purpose of "putting the material to use" (p. 20). A unique cornerstone of this version of TBL is that the authors observe the creation of "a rhythm of moments in which the students' social and intellectual experiences of the classroom become interlocked and amplified" (p. 20). Drawing on the four principal components of TBL, namely, readiness assurance, properly used teams, peer evaluation, and application exercises, the authors claim a "synergistic system" that has application "in virtually every discipline" (p. 6). The remaining two chapters of "Foundations" round out the introduction to TBL: "Facilitation of Application Activities" and "Peer Feedback Processes and Individual Accountability in TBL Contexts." As is the norm throughout the book, the chapters terminate with a full set of references.

The aptly entitled second section, "Voices of Experience," contains 15 chapters outlining concrete applications of TBL-based teaching strategies in a variety of disciplinary learning contexts: psychology, sociology, economics, research methods, literature, history, cultural studies, politics, theatre, life sciences, to name a few. Each of these chapters provides the reader with a "real world" application of TBL in the classroom, including challenges and barriers that can be overcome with clever design solutions. These are especially helpful as concrete examples of how one might integrate TBL into the teaching and learning of one's discipline in a course context. Moving outside one's content area, there are many interesting and creative applications and design innovations throughout that make for inspirational reading.

For those looking for ways to integrate TBL teaching strategies and processes within a technology-rich learning environment, either exclusively online or using a blended approach, there is a paucity of helpful information here: this book clearly has a face-to-face classroom orientation, with only one chapter (of 18) dedicated to the application of TBL with educational technology, Milligan's "Using Technology to Support Team-Based Learning." I would underscore her claim that "[teachers] must see best practices in action if they are going to be able to move beyond the teaching methods they have experienced in their own ... education," and I would argue that this is relevant not only to the adoption of the TBL approach but also the qualitatively different e-learning environments and the creative learning design challenges they demand. While this chapter discusses the application of some educational technologies (e.g., creative use of PowerPoint), it is the use of wikis for both application problems and team/peer evaluations that provide beginning evidence of the utility of educational technology to support TBL processes for the enhancement of learning. Milligan brings us a little further toward the hoped-for outcome, namely, "a vision of how teachers can use technology to support the learning of all students" (p. 262). However, an expansion and deeper articulation of how multiple and various educational technologies can be utilized and integrated with the principles of TBL, within new and richer e-learning environments, would be a welcome addition to any further editions of this book.

Despite the exclusive focus on formal educational contexts (K-12 and higher education), the TBL approach outlined and illustrated in this book has implications for designers of adult and continuing education, including those non-formal contexts that are often the "bread and butter" of university-based continuing education units. Active engagement with core ideas and principles in a topic area, and the explicit enhancement and refinement of critical thinking processes are the core goals behind the TBL approach, and these can also be fundamental to the design and implementation of quality educational events across the board. This book will provide a solid background in TBL, as well as providing many "stories of application" that will inform the designer-teacher of university continuing education events and experiences.

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