Weaving Equity and Inclusion into Team-Based Learning via Universal Design

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Background

In the first year of our innovative Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) program, the authors co-taught a course using Team-Based Learning (TBL) strategies to a student population with varied academic backgrounds.

Methods

Sources:
- Instructor experiences and reflection
- Student midterm and final course evaluations
- Team Based Learning (TBL) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) literature

Approach:
- Describe difficulties encountered in first run of a TBL-based course.
- Analyze difficulties in light of each approach.
- Consider strengths and modifications for educational equity, inclusion, and effectiveness.

Our Use of TBL Format

We employed the **four main elements:**
- **Permanent Teams** with diverse skillsets
- **Readiness Assurances** - Individual and team quizzes covering readings
- **Application Activities** to integrate new learning
- **Peer Evaluation** to hold students accountable to each other and foster professional learning

UDL Principles

Universal Design for Learning is an equity-focused approach to remove learning barriers via:
- **Multiple Means of Representation – the "what":** Content and information presented in multiple formats
- **Multiple Means of Action and Expression – the "how"**
  - Varied ways to 1) interact with and integrate information 2) demonstrate knowledge.
- **Multiple Means of Engagement – the "why":** strategies of motivating and engaging students

Challenges We Experienced

Preparatory Materials

- Chosen text abstract, complex and assumed knowledge of the profession
- Few alternative learning materials available

Readiness Assurances

- Design questions: Where to target level of difficulty? Integrate new with prior material?
- How to accommodate additional time needed?
- Some students felt quizzes without lectures unfair
- In-class appeals lengthy; fostered tension

Classroom Activities and Environment

- Contentious atmosphere despite icebreakers and other community-building efforts
- Internal team conflicts hidden and unresolved
- Students impatient with flaws in learning activities

Adjustments Using UDL Principles

Midterm Changes per student feedback:

- **The What:** Added video and arts media content.
- **The How:** Fewer readiness assurances and focused on comprehension of readings. Set aside 10 minutes for discussion/clarification prior to readiness assurance.
- **The Why:** Explicit discussion of TBL philosophy and other pedagogical choices and options.

Future Adjustments:

- **The What:** Locate or create varied preparation materials. Consider brief in-class or video lectures. Build scaffolding and feedback into preparatory activities.
- **The How:** Restructure some classroom learning activities.
- Revise selection strategy for diverse teams.
- **The Why:** Integrate learning about professional autonomy, team dynamics and conflict resolution to highlight professional relevance.

Reflection

- **The What:** Our course could better address information access and equity by creating diverse preparation materials.
- **The How:** Our course addressed "how" fairly well via varied classroom learning activities and assessments. We will improve them with practice.
- **The Why:** For some students, tensions around certain TBL procedures detracted from learning. Welcoming feedback, discussing pedagogy and co-creating adjustments with students contributed to an environment of trust and shared ownership.

Conclusion

- Newcomers to a pedagogical method may hesitate to adjust procedures for fear of losing the method's learning benefits.
- However, UDL principles may be "woven in" or "cross-pollinated" to good results for equity, inclusion and learning outcomes.
- Encouraging regular student input by multiple means enables instructors to address barriers.

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