Making Teamwork Work

Most human undertakings require teamwork—from constructing the pyramids to making dinner: Group projects are nothing new, and they aren't going to end when your students leave school. We should consider reminding our students of that fact when the inevitable groan erupts from our declaring "Group Project"! As Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

Below are some ideas for addressing student resistance to fully participating in group activities or assignments.

Consider having students create and fill out a skills-set rubric, so individual group members are clear on what tasks would be best for each individual. A grid for spaces might ask for the following:
- Educational Background / Academic Major
- General Knowledge of Course Content
- Specialized Knowledge (web construction etc.)
- Skills (writing, presenting, drawing, web design)

Use a hybrid approach when grouping students. Allow students some involvement (but reserve veto power). Limit number of students and—for example—try to vary skill sets, such as ensuring an age-rage, or having each student represent a different major.

Schedule one class period (or part of one) for group work.
This gives you the opportunity to oversee each group's dynamics and offer any necessary interventions at that time, or schedule one for later if necessary.

Require students to use a wiki for the ongoing work of any written portion of the project. The wiki's program tracks each student's submissions – when and how much time each one has spent on his or her task. If you can meet when the project is at roughly the 1/3 mark, you can intervene with any individual who isn't pulling his/her weight.
This does mean you'll need to provide an example, and spend a portion of one class period to demonstrate how to use the wiki feature on your course's BB site. If you sense most or all of your students are onboard using the wiki, you can offer to schedule a team meeting within the first 2 or 3 weeks of the project during office hours for any team that might need extra assistance.

Design the project so that it has two separate grades. One is solely a completion grade. Provide a few due-dates, each requiring nothing more than proof of a task being accomplished (i.e., you're not grading for quality at this point). Each due date is a minor grade, one you eyeball for completion, nothing more. One 'zero' won't

make a letter grade difference for the student, but it may get the slowpoke's attention. The other grade is the quality grade that is assigned after the project is completed. This strategy gives each student some sense of how their whole-hearted participation will gain them a good grade, but there's some wiggle room if they don't get off the mark right away.

Provide a low-stakes reward for the team with the best record of total buy-in.
> A certificate allowing a late submission of one (future) assignment for each member
> Extra-credit points
> Opportunity to contribute input for a mid-term exam
> Forgiveness of an absence
> Bragging rights as their group's project will be featured on next semester's website as an example of a great production.

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Instructor Actions that can Improve Group Cohesion and Success
- Share with student groups the *purpose* and *importance* of the ground rules
- Clarify the rationale for the enterprise so they comprehend the exercise as a relevant learning experience that goes beyond the classroom.
- Create a safe classroom environment so students have the *freedom to make mistakes on the way to making sense* without being penalized
- Assess individual and group performance according to a criteria or rubric that the student groups have had since the beginning of the project.
- Monitor group discussions when possible, and provide feedback to help keep the group on track toward resolving the problem
- Take time to debrief once the enterprise has concluded. Make sure everyone has the chance to revisit the rationale for the project.

Team Work Resources

Best practices for designing group projects:
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/design.html
Sample team contracts
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html
Choose related teamwork tools
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html

Designing small group engaged learning activities:
Collaborative learning: http://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/engaging-students/collaborative-learning.html#examples
Choose related team work tools:
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html
Small group work: http://teaching.uchicago.edu/teaching-guides/small-group-work/

Forming groups and introducing students to group work:
How can I compose groups?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/compose.html
What are the benefits of group work?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/benefits.html
Choose related team work tools?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html

Challenges of group work and potential strategies:
What are the challenges of group work and how can I address them?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/challenges.html
Choose related team work tools:
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html
Group projects aren't working:
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/solveproblem/strat-groupwork/groupwork-08.html
Warren, Lee. Managing hot moments in the classroom?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/Teaching/CourseDesign/InstructionalStrategies/HotMomentsClassroom.pdf

Monitoring and assessment of group work:
How can I assess group work?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/assess.html
How can I monitor groups?
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/monitor.html
Choose related teamwork tools:
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/tools/index.html