Turning A Group into a Team

By Claudia Faulk

1. The Starting Point:
2. I am one of many teachers who is also a student. Some if us are life-long learners. Some of us did school in the backward order. Work first, get the degree as an after effect. That’s me.
3. I am working on my Masters in EdTec at SDSU
4. A significant amount of the work in this masters includes working in groups.
5. The student aide asked. “Weren’t you taught to do group work?
6. Discussed in class and someone called out: “A group is NOT always a team.”
7. The Typical Response:
8. Groaning, dismay, frustration
9. Students think teachers do group work to free up their time
10. The “know” class group work is NOT like real life.
11. There is the fear of having to do all the work
12. The fear of not being good enough to contribute so you do no work
13. Frustration that everyone gets the same grade regardless of effort.
14. Or worse still, someone gets a better grade and they did little or no work
15. But—there is always that successful group who makes it look easy
16. If there is such a negative reaction, why do we have our students do group work?
17. We are encouraged to give students an opportunity to develop their cooperative work skills.
18. There is the possibility for a much deeper level of learning when students interact and actively discuss, research, argue, defend their point of view, and teach other members about the topic.
19. Students working in small groups tend to remember more of what they learned and have a better understanding of the material
20. Expectations
21. Be clear up front as to what you expect from the group.
22. Get the students to discuss their expectations of the project too.
23. Be an active participant – do not define the group, chose the topic and let them sink or swim
24. You will be able to tell how actively you need to be involved. Some groups need more guidance. Some work well together. Be ready to help with small issues that come up along the way.
25. Quick and Simple Group Work (One day or One Week projects)
26. Variations on the Question and Answer
27. Teacher sets the question, student break up into group to discuss and come back with their groups answer. Online separate sets of questions can be posted for individual groups, they have a dialogue and submit a final answer
28. Students are broken up onto groups. Each week one student poses a question from the material covered in class, the others discuss and post an answer. The next week or class, another student in the group poses the question.
29. The first student comments on a question, the 2nd students recaps the comment to make sure they understand when listening or reading the first students thoughts.
30. Critiques or Project Reviews
31. Group discussions of presentations, papers or projects. Reviewing material covered. Come up with a consensus on their response. Students are then exposed to peer work and also review by peers.
32. The Big Deal: Multiple Week Group Projects

A. Set the expectations clearly. Whether you chose the groups or the students chose their own partners, there are bound to be some students who are not satisfied.

B. Remind them YOU are a member of their group too.

C. Give them a plan to start with.

1. Communication
2. Everyone should exchange phone numbers and emails. Make sure they are ones that the students really use or check. They need to promise to check for contact on a daily basis. No giving out emails that are hard to check, no excuses.
3. Have them make a list of outside projects (work, other classes, etc) and the hours they are available. Then need to be flexible to meet the needs of the most busy person, but that person needs to be as flexible as possible too
4. Discuss options of contact: Chat, Skype, email, phone, and face to face
5. Skills and Tasks
6. Decide if you will help define roles.
7. All are equal, have equal vote on the project, but there needs to be a leader to keep the project on track
8. Someone needs to take notes
9. Discuss the project and the level they of project they want to commit to.
10. Have them discuss and share their specific talents, writing, research, graphics, share their knowledge to teach others.
11. YOU can decide if they should rotate who takes on which role. This can promote growth in an area that they had not tried before. Not everyone wants to be defined by the same role in every project. If they are not as strong in research, they could team up with someone who is and strengthen a weak skill.
12. Steps or Chunks of a Project
13. A long-term project can seem an overwhelming task. Help them break it up in weekly deliverables.
14. Procrastinators then have less of a chance to upset the whole project. A small piece is easier to finish at the last minute than a large piece.
15. Students may work harder when they know someone else’s work is based on what they produce. It will reinforce timeliness
16. Distributing the Load
17. Have students sign up for the task they will complete each week.
18. Your role is to be sure that the workload is balanced.
19. Have a different person check in with you each week. Have them discuss or review what material was covered that week.
20. Shifting Goals
21. As work progresses, goals can change or shift. If this works with your established outcome, then reassure students that this is normal. If you can be fe flexible, let them be flexible too.
22. Help them talk through the inevitable frictions, resolve issues.
23. The Final Product: Reaching the Goal
24. There is so much more produced that the “final project”.
25. Students can develop
* a deeper understanding of the topic
* learn to work collaboratively
* develop leadership skills
* have gains in self-esteem
* develop conflict resolution skills

Even though students often think that classroom group work is not related to real life experiences, if they develop even a few of these, they are fully transferable life skills that will help them with work and day to day living. And THAT is the real A+ for the project.