

TEAMWORK IN CLASSROOMS

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In this short note, I share my experience on how teamwork can potentially improve student performance in courses.

A quote attributed to Helen Keller, the well-known American author, states “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” aptly conveys the essence of teamwork. With increasing class sizes coupled with other responsibilities of faculty, the amount of individual attention that a teacher can provide to a student in and out of classrooms is decreasing. One way to tackle this problem is to form teams in classrooms and make them learn from one another. I believe that one important mode of learning is “peer learning” and this can be promoted amongst students by making them work in teams for their in-class and out-of-class assignments. This is an idea I picked up from the first Faculty Development Programme organized by our Institute along with experts from Texas A&M University.

I had tried out this approach in my core undergraduate classes and it has worked really well till date. Before the first class, I obtain the details on the CGPA of the class students and sort them in the descending order. Then, I divide the list into four quarters and form teams that consist of one member from each of these four quarters. I also make the members of the team sit together during class. During the lectures, I give in-class team assignments and I ask each team to submit one solution. I ensure that each assignment has enough content such that it would take the combined efforts of all members of a team to solve it completely in the allotted time. It takes a few classes for the initial reluctance to fade away and after that I observed very enthusiastic discussions amongst the students during these exercises. This effort translated to their continued interaction in out-of-class assignments.

The tangible benefits of this exercise were evident as the semester progressed. The students began interacting with each other to a greater extent to discuss questions before they approached me (leading to better “peer learning”). The performance of the students, particularly those in the last quarter, improved significantly. This resulted in a better overall performance of the class.