

## Chapter 2

# Team-Based Learning in Introductory Translation Courses

**Melissa Wallace**

*University of Texas – San Antonio, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the implementation of a teaching and learning strategy that lends itself propitiously to social constructivist-oriented introductory translation courses. Team-based learning, a methodology developed by Michaelsen, Knight, and Fink (2004) that purports to foster accountability, cohesion, and solidarity among fixed work teams proved itself to be ideally suited to the undergraduate translation studies environment according to the results of a survey-driven assessment tool. Students revealed their perceptions of the effectiveness of learning teams – teams that were assessed in general for a specific course's course components and learning outcomes as well as in relation to the core make-up of the learning teams themselves. The chapter describes a variety of empowerment-building assignments as well as discusses the implementation of team-based learning in this context. Finally, the degree to which the methodology contributed to students' perceptions of their learning experience is examined.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the implementation in the fall of 2011 of the teaching and learning methodology known as team-based learning (Michaelsen, Knight, & Fink, 2004) in an undergraduate translation course offering equal parts translation theory, workshop-style practice, and a practical / professional component. Functioning as a stand-

alone introductory translation course in a Spanish-language training track for traditional Spanish majors at a four-year comprehensive American university<sup>1</sup>, the course in question straddles the space between a traditional language course and an introduction to the field of translation. SPA 470 Introduction to Spanish Translation serves native English-speaking students who are at the end of their program of study and who have acquired

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intermediate-high to advanced-mid proficiency on the ACTFL scale in Spanish either through coursework or experience living abroad.

Because of the hybrid nature of the course as one that aims at improving Spanish language proficiency in addition to introducing students to the discipline of translation studies, specific goals informed the selection of pedagogical strategies to implement. The application of team-based learning (TBL) to SPA 470 Introduction to Spanish Translation was conscientiously conceived to promote empowerment, collaboration, and professional self-actualization among a population of undergraduates who had reached a critical moment in their language acquisition trajectories and who were ripe to consider translation studies as a worthy professional or academic pursuit. SPA 470 was designed based on the specific needs and characteristics of the main stakeholders in the process: the students themselves.

Bearing in mind my own deliberately un-concealed agenda to promote translation studies and to galvanize students to think more expansively about their language abilities, one of the course's first objectives was to support students in producing the most sophisticated, nuanced and well-researched translations possible for their current level of language proficiency. The second objective was to encourage critical analysis and to help students to acquire the tools necessary to examine and understand contemporary translation theories. Absolutely germane to the course's entire design was a thoroughly social constructivist philosophical underpinning, very much in concert with the ideas of Don Kiraly (2000). Other objectives included lowering students' anxiety levels related to the theory component of the course as well as in regards to insecurities about their Spanish proficiency, meant to be achieved by building community and supporting them in their acquisition of strategies to optimize the advantages of teamwork. Such strategies, certainly, would serve them well in other academic disciplines as well as outside the university, and are deeply relevant

to the professional practice of translation in the real world. To this end, then, the design of the course took as its point of departure a series of premises which informed the construction of the entire syllabus, some or all of which may not be shared philosophically by all instructors.

## **SETTING AND PREMISES**

To begin, the design of SPA 470 hinged on a basic premise: that experimenting (in the sense of trying new pedagogies, new assignments, and new ways of assessing) on and with students is fun and important work. If an instructor values the idea of stimulating a culture of research (as important at the undergraduate level as at the graduate level), then a commitment to experimentation on students liberates all stakeholders in the learning process.

In this vein, in his 2009 lecture for the Monterey Institute of International Studies, Anthony Pym discusses specific types of experiments that can be done with and on students including eye tracking (Pavlović 2009a; O'Brien 2006), think aloud protocol, or varying the *skopos* (or instructions of the patron who is commissioning the translation) of a translation assignment in order to compare the renderings of a key concept. Pym considers experiments to be good pedagogy, enhancing students' self-awareness as well as their awareness of other cultures and diversity within translation cultures. The results of Pym's experiments with his students show what many may intuit: that students experiment to discover things about themselves and to learn how to draw conclusions and, by doing so, they help to advance the profession by contributing to professional research (2009). At the same time, students discover and articulate the competencies they need to learn on their own, without having them imposed from above either by their instructors or by institutional mandates. To this end, the types of assignments and assessment methods described in this chapter offer examples of how this self-discovery might transpire.

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