

# Exploring Active Blended Learning Through the Lens of Team-Based Learning

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This chapter showcases how the collaborative learning and teaching strategy known as Team-Based Learning™ (TBL) can deliver against the conceptual components within active blended learning (ABL), through exploration of different case studies from the authors' university. It begins by detailing the core concepts and theories underpinning each pedagogic approach before considering how adoption of TBL is consistent with the wider implementation of ABL. Case histories are used to highlight how these approaches enhance the student learning experience and how learning technologies can enable staff to do more of what they value within the classroom. The value of different learning spaces to facilitate TBL and augment the learning experience for both staff and students is considered. Finally, the chapter explores some of the more difficult questions around the lack of broader uptake of TBL within an institution committed to ABL as its standard approach to learning and teaching.*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers how Team-Based Learning™ (TBL) has been implemented at the University of Northampton as part of an institutional pedagogic shift to Active Blended Learning (ABL). Three case study examples provide a lens through which to explore aspects that practitioners could consider when designing programmes and modules to increase student engagement and satisfaction and improve student outcomes. The case studies highlight how the move from traditional learning and teaching spaces (e.g., lecture theatres and fixed seating) to social learning spaces both within and without the classroom,

impacts on students' ability to meet the intended learning outcomes. The TBL framework also forces tutors to consider how to design and facilitate a blended learning experience by combining different features of 'the blend' (Armellini, 2019a) other than just traditional notions of face-to-face and online learning in a way that is effective for the tutor and the student, and appropriate for the subject discipline (Shulman, 2005).

One interesting aspect of the discussion will focus on the advantages and the limitations of using technology to deliver the important 'readiness assurance' process that is used to ensure a baseline level of knowledge and understanding for all participants. Traditionally, this process is paper-based, but the advantages and challenges arising from a growing desire to use technology for this purpose will be considered from both pedagogical and technological perspectives.

Within the classroom, use of both ABL and TBL prompts a significant change to the role and purpose of tutors as they move away from delivery or transmission of content to facilitating discussion within and between groups and teams to support student application of the underpinning knowledge. The impact of this shift in practice has consequences for the depth of student learning and attainment. Ultimately, it is necessary to consider the impact of this on individual achievement – whether at University or within the world of work. This chapter will therefore seek to identify the characteristics of an effective TBL practitioner and explore associated staff development needs. It will also consider the data on student satisfaction and attainment.

## **Contextual Overview**

The case studies that are featured in this overview are all drawn from the authors' experiences at the University of Northampton. Situating the case studies as part of the broader context at the University over the 6-year period between 2014-2020 is a fundamental prerequisite to the exploration of ABL through the lens of TBL which follows.

The University of Northampton, based near the heart of England about an hour north of London, is a teaching-focused higher education institution (HEI) with an on-campus population of around 11,500 (2018-19) undergraduate students. Around 7,700 are UK-based undergraduates typically studying a 3-year bachelor's degree. A significant proportion of these undergraduates are enrolled on education or nursing and other allied health-profession programmes, continuing the University's strong heritage in the education of key workers in these two employment sectors.

In 2014, the University commenced a radical redesign of learning and teaching across all subject areas. Building on a strategic drive to deliver a "unique learning and teaching ... model" (University of Northampton, 2015, p. 3) and to compete "with the world on its own terms" (University of Northampton, 2015, p. 4), the new model moved away from didactic teaching methods typified by one-way transmission of 'content', to highly interactive learning opportunities that engendered student engagement through well-designed activities that engaged participants not only with content, but also in a two-way conversation with their tutors and their peers (see further Maxwell, 2020).

In the early stages of the (re-)design and development process, colleagues from the University's central Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT) as well as faculty tutors, explored different pedagogies in use elsewhere within higher education (HE) with a view to learning from and implementing best practice insofar as it aligned with the new model. Over time, the underpinning principles of the new model emerged and were shared across the institution, along with lessons learned by early adopters of the model. At their most succinct, these principles expect students to be active in their

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