Contents of the kit

Preface: why and how

Increase student achievement and learning. Revitalise your team's operation and effectiveness. Achieve these two interrelated goals with this kit. While this book looks at interdisciplinary teams, which have become a key feature in the middle school reforms of the past decade in Australia, many of the ideas and issues it covers can be applied to the multitude of teams that operate as an everyday part of school life. It is time to review and revitalise middle school reform because it is recognised that too few teams have made sufficient progress to the ideals of reform in middle school curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This staff development resource can help to correct that situation. Teams who work through this kit will truly improve students' learning and thereby achieve higher standards. A team just getting started or an individual teacher can adapt this kit for their purposes. Study groups comprised of members of two or more teams will also find this material most appropriate to use in furthering their collaborative efforts.

Each activity is made up of three Rs: *Read and react* includes some basic information on a certain aspect of, or theory on, the implementation of teams; *Action research* includes a directions for implementing the activity that will provide practice or application of the tool or technique; *Reflect* includes some way to measure your success in using the activity.

The kit is a self-contained package – all materials and forms needed are included, although some forms will need to be copied so each team member or individual can have a copy to complete. A number of activities will require writing, so have a paper and pen on hand. A folder or notebook should be established to serve as a portfolio/journal for the results of the many engaging activities included. These activities, for the most part, can be completed during those common planning periods devoted to staff development or in other designated times during the school day.

The use of related professional literature will add strength to a team's efforts to improve student achievement. One volume in particular ought to be readily available to any team or group serious about making the most of teaming. *We Gain More Than We Give: Teaming in Middle Schools*, edited by Dickinson and Erb (NMSA, 1997) is a major work of continuing importance. Scholarly, yet highly readable, relevant and practical, it continues as the most comprehensive and rich resource on middle level teams in existence. Excerpts from this volume form the basis for many of the activities in these modules. A selected and annotated list of resources is included at the end of this kit. It would be advisable to determine which titles are already available on your school's professional resource shelf and submit orders for those titles not now available in the school.

Module I
Rethinking the concept of teams

Activity 1

Read and react:

We gain more than we give

After each member of the team reads the two excerpts on the following pages from the chapter, 'Pushing Humpty Off the Wall: Stories for a New Age of Teaming' by Thomas S. Dickinson in *We Gain More Than We Give: Teaming in Middle Schools* (pp. 5–6 and 16–17), react to the author's notion of 'the impostor syndrome'. Do you know or can you relate to someone who feels they are an impostor?

Action research:

Mission driven teams

1. Brainstorm reasons why a team should be 'mission driven'. Consider both the author's arguments and those you and your colleagues can add.

2. Think of a group or a team that each of you is currently involved with but that is not directly involved with your school or work role. Write down the common goal or purpose for that team, the unique contributions of at least three different members of that team and two benefits to you as a member of that team.

Reflect:

Start a portfolio/journal

Decide on a way to maintain a functional record of your professional learning teams discussions and ideas and their application. Each member of the team should have a personal portfolio or journal to reflect on each of the activities. In your portfolio/journal write your reflections on the *Team quotations* selected from Dickinson's chapter on page 7. Which one or more of these contain ideas that appeal to you? Is there anything you don't agree with?

Use a computer to print out one or more of the quotations that have special appeal to your team and display for others to read and enjoy. Try collecting several quotations from other sources that define teams. Refer to these 'words of wisdom' when you need them, perhaps creating posters for the staffroom.

Wanted: Mission-driven middle school teams

What I know about teams comes from my time in the military. And the most important lesson I learned in the military about teams was that they were mission driven. Mission – that was the focus, the goal, the reason for being. Everything revolved around mission. And for the team to be effective the mission also had to be clear, not vague, not ambiguous, not fuzzy, but clear and clear to all members of the team. In the military, teams did not formulate mission, they implemented it. And they attempted to implement it in the most resource-effective manner possible in the quickest possible time frame. It was also important that all members of the team understood the mission, understood their part in implementing it, understood the parameters of their efforts.

In all my time in the military in small teams I never heard the mission challenged. While there were obviously individuals with concerns over almost any mission the prevailing attitude was articulated as 'Okay people, we've got a job to do so let's do it.' I also never heard any challenge to team composition. I never heard anyone state overtly 'I don't want to work with this individual.' That was not a choice. Personality conflicts did not exist in teams performing missions.

Middle school teams could learn from the military's orientation to teams, especially from their emphasis on mission-driven teams. I believe that there is too much emphasis in many middle school teams on the adults and not enough emphasis on students and their learning which is the real mission of the team at the middle school. Bottom line, teams exist for students and their best development, not for adults. And while I know full well the benefits that adults derive from teams – the ability to work together with a colleague rather than in isolation – I also know that that is not the mission of teams.

One of the most significant problems of teams, it seems to me, is their misplaced focus on themselves, especially when it comes to team composition and the continuing debates over who works with whom. Often I find the 'personality conflict issue' to be a handy excuse to not invest in the development of the team, as a cop-out for any number of adult concerns that have nothing to do with student learning.

Being mission driven, and that should apply to all members of the team regardless of their background, means having a singular focus on young adolescents. It means working with colleagues with an eye on the needs of youth and not on petty conflicts, personal disagreements, potential slights, or imagined hurts. It means compromise, real listening, openly resolving problems and confronting those problems readily so that the team can best devote its energies to accomplishing its stated mission.

The impostor syndrome

I have always wondered why some individuals on middle school teams do not invest in the team, do not work within the structure, do not cooperate, do not become someone described as a 'team player.' I am not talking about those individuals who do not participate in their team because they do not want to be there, do not like kids, do not like their jobs, do not even like themselves. There is another solution for these individuals, but that is another story.

I am talking about good teachers, people who like young adolescents and working with them, creative people who enjoy coming to work every day and who transmit this joy to their charges. I wonder why they do not make the move, do not learn the lessons of becoming a team member, do not take the plunge.

Maybe they cannot.

Over the last ten years educational psychologists and researchers looking at teachers and teacher behaviours have identified a condition that may identify why some middle school team members do not want to invest themselves in a team. Called 'the impostor syndrome' it is characterized by a feeling of 'I-don't-really-deserve-to-be-here-and-if-I'm-not-careful-people-will-find-me-out.' DeVries comments:

> These people have an abiding feeling that they have fooled everyone and are not as competent and intelligent as

others think they are. They attribute their success to good luck, compensatory hard work, or superficial factors such as physical attractiveness and likability. Some are incredibly hardworking, always overprepared. However, they are unable to accept that they have intellectual gifts and ability. They live in constant fear that their imposturous existence will be exposed – that they will not be able to measure up to others' expectations and that catastrophe will follow.

The impostor syndrome can survive in teaching with our prevailing ethic of privacy. Behind closed doors, hidden away, a teacher with a feeling of impostorship can survive a crippling existence. But a middle school team, with its openness, its critical reflection, its debate and discussion, its cooperative, collaborative planning and execution is a massive threat to an impostor. And it may be the reason why some very talented teachers – highly creative and hardworking individuals – are repelled by teams.

The solution to the problem can only be openness and honesty about our own self-doubts about our work. For a teacher with a feeling of impostorship being on a team means that the impostor's overly critical and often incorrect view of his/her own work can be balanced by colleagues who offer honest and accurate appraisals as well as suggestions for improvement.

It may be a small point, but for some of our colleagues, being part of a team is a very scary situation.

Team quotations

Forming
Storming
Norming
Performing

– Bruce W. Tuckman,
Development sequence in small groups
Psychological Bulletin

What we need today is not a number of Leonardos, but rather groups of interdisciplinarians … Now it becomes clear that the focus of scientific knowledge is shifting from individuals to groups. Scientific knowledge has become a collective product that is only imperfectly represented in isolated individuals.

– Joseph Kockelmans,
Why interdisciplinarity?
in *Interdisciplinarity and Higher Education*

Pseudo-team: This is a group [that] … has not focused on collective performance and is not really trying to achieve it. It has no interest in shaping a common purpose or set of performance goals, even though it may call itself a team … In pseudo-teams, the sum of the whole is less than the potential of the individual parts.

– Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith,
The Wisdom of Teams

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

– Jon R. Katzenback and
Douglas K. Smith
The Wisdom of Teams

The strength of the pack is in the wolf and the strength of the wolf is in the pack.

– Rudyard Kipling
The Jungle Book

Not power over but power with.

– Two signs over a teacher's desk at
Chancey Rose Middle School in
Terre Haute, Indiana

As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate. When the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'We did it ourselves.'

– Lao-Tzu

Activity 2

Read and react:

What is a team anyway?

A team by definition is a group of people or animals working together – the reference to animals readily brings to mind a team of dogs drawing a sled, horses drawing a coach or oxen pulling a plough. Working together is an inseparable concept in defining a team. To pull in different directions, no matter how hard the individual is working, will often be less than productive. The slogan 'Together everyone achieves more', or T.E.A.M., should ring true for all teachers and should be a motivation for positive involvement in teams.

There are many kinds of teams in our lives – sport teams, fundraising groups, volunteer organisations, study or book groups, work committees, political groups, musical groups, hobby clubs, religious groups, scout troops, boards of directors, youth groups and special interest groups. These groups all share the following characteristics: a shared purpose or common goal; people having to work together; and a payoff for everyone on the team.

Likewise there are many teams in schools, some long term – as in the case of team teaching, interdisciplinary teams and learning areas – others short term – such as working parties, professional learning teams and event planning committees. The groans that often accompany the mention of meetings in schools are, sadly, the result of many poorly run meetings, and overworked and unfocussed committees; however, this does not need to be the case. Team meetings can be rewarding and even fun!

How do you feel about meetings? Can the outcomes of meetings be affected by a negative approach? Share your thoughts.

Action research:

Your team role

1. Each of you think about your role as a member of a school or non-school team and complete a copy of the checklist *Traits of effective team members* (p. 9) to determine how successful you really are as a team member in that situation. Share these results.

2. Now think about your actions as a member of your school team and each of you complete the rating scale *Ways to determine if you are a good team player* (p. 10). Share the results with one another.

Reflect:

Goals for teams

During your research you have had to share some of your good and perhaps not so good points. In your portfolio/journal set a personal goal for yourself to improve your performance as a team member.

Traits of effective team members

Review the list of behaviours most often associated with effective team members and put a plus (+) in front of those you are most likely to exhibit, a minus (–) in front of those you are least likely to exhibit and an asterisk (*) in front of those you are not, as a member of a team, sure about. Analyse your responses and determine whether you are a good candidate for a team or a not-so-good candidate for a team.

1. _____ Be on time for meetings

2. _____ Be prepared for meetings

3. _____ Stick to agenda for meetings

4. _____ Engage in open, honest communication

5. _____ Practice active listening

6. _____ Criticise ideas, not individuals

7. _____ Be an active participant

8. _____ Perform promised follow-up

9. _____ Stay open-minded

10. _____ Use 'we' instead of 'you' expressions and statements

11. _____ Say what you think and feel

12. _____ Handle conflict professionally

13. _____ Support other members

14. _____ Be willing to take risks

15. _____ Display sense of humour

16. _____ Show commitment toward making something work

17. _____ Be courteous and attentive to ideas of others

18. _____ Accept roles and responsibilities for team activities

19. _____ Assume leadership as needed

20. _____ Stay on task or topic

Ways to determine if you are a good team player

Determine whether you are a good team player by rating yourself on the following 1–5 continuum.

1. I am well aware of my team role and the functions of the team.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

2. I express my willingness to cooperate with other group members and my expectation that they will also be cooperative with me.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

3. I support the efforts of the team leader and other team members.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

4. I follow the guidelines for gaining consensus and participate equally in making team decisions.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

5. I am open and candid in my dealings with the team.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

6. I recognise the relationship of planning periods to the effectiveness of the team's activities.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

7. I respond to the needs of students through the teaming process.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

8. I do my part in helping to resolve conflicts among team members.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

9. I share materials, books, sources of information or other resources with other team members to promote the success of the group.
   Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

10. I collect and use data for purposes of improving the team's effectiveness and for developing the overall instructional program.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

11. I stick to agenda items at team meetings whenever possible.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

12. I complete team paperwork and tasks in a timely fashion.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

13. I actively participate in parent and/or student conferences.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

14. I communicate effectively with team members, parents, administration and other support staff.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

15. I regularly participate in staff development activities.
    Never   *1*   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*   *Always*

Activity 3

Read and react:

Your team's characteristics and plans

As a team, review the items *Characteristics of effective teams* (p. 12). In addition, each team member should complete the activity entitled *Tips for team building* (p. 13).

Action research:

Definitions and missions

Use these items along with ideas from previous activities to complete the following items.

1. Develop your team's definition of an interdisciplinary team in the middle school.

2. Brainstorm ideas for your team's mission statement and refine them until you have a brief, clear statement.

3. Set at least three criteria that can be used to evaluate your team's progress.

Reflect:

Personal goals

Complete the *Goals for Personal development as a team member* worksheets (p. 14–15) some time before the next team meeting. Thoughtfully select one goal to improve on and regularly return back to this sheet (especially before each meeting) to assess your personal progress. Reflect on your success, and set new goals when you are ready. Remember the formula for setting SMART goals. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based.

Characteristics of effective teams

1. Team members share both individual and team goals so that personal agendas do not interfere with the team's mission.

2. Team members are committed to achieving the established goals and everyone is willing to shift responsibilities to carry their own load.

3. Team members recognise that there is a genuine need for each team member and that solid individual and group competence is the key to team effectiveness.

4. Team members feel empowered and recognise that collaboration is more important than competition in getting their work done.

5. Team members are open-minded and respect one another's ideas so as to seek win-win solutions when dealing with varying opinions.

6. Team members feel comfortable taking risks because they have been able to substitute trust and loyalty in place of fear and pettiness.

7. Team members view conflicts and controversy as opportunities to explore new ideas and engage in personal growth.

8. Team members are comfortable with giving feedback to the team that is direct, prompt, dependable and usable.

9. Team members value rotation of leadership so that no one person dominates.

10. Team members make decisions through consensus so that all members can support the decision once it has been made.

11. Team members recognise the importance of change and consistently strive for self-improvement of its procedures, processes and practices.

12. Team members plan rewards for the team and take time to celebrate their successes regularly and consistently.

Tips for team building

The following list includes several important ideas related to team building. They are not in any order. First, identify the five concepts most important to you personally as a team member. Use the line at the left of each statement. Next, identify your team's top five using lines to the right.

Individual   Team

_____   Create a team mission   _____

_____   Define roles and responsibilities   _____

_____   Decide on team identity   _____

_____   Focus on 'we' or 'us'   _____

_____   Value humour   _____

_____   Develop an open atmosphere   _____

_____   Plan cooperatively   _____

_____   Commit to support one another   _____

_____   Keep lines of communication open   _____

_____   Discuss/understand expectations   _____

_____   View conflict as opportunity   _____

_____   Reinforce consistency   _____

_____   Share and explore new ideas together   _____

_____   Build on each other's strengths   _____

_____   Socialise   _____

After sharing the 'top fives' of individual team members, prepare a list of the team's top five items.