[Introduction]
Welcome to the Teaching Remotely Together podcast - where our goal is to connect instructors who are willing to explore, share, and learn about one another's successes teaching in a remote learning environment. In hearing from different instructors on new topics each week, we hope their stories and ideas may inspire new ideas for your own classes. Our topic for this week? Group work.

[Adrie Koehler]
Hello! I'm Dr. Adrie Koehler. I'm an assistant professor in Learning Design and Technology in the College of Education. I want to share some strategies about facilitating group work in online settings.

When considering complex topics, I believe that a social element is very important, as collaborating with peers and an instructor can help support the sense-making process, and group work provides this opportunity.

Unfortunately, I think we have all be a part of team-based projects that haven't gone so well, which can make us all feel a little apprehensive about the process. And, maybe, this also suggests that successfully working in teams is a skill that we need to practice and intentionally develop.

When collaboration is done right, we can gain so much from the experience. That is, we get a chance to consider diverse viewpoints, brainstorm ideas for a common goal, and offer and receive constructive feedback.

Finally, when our students graduate and transition into professional positions, they will likely be required to work in teams. And these teams may take many forms, including geographically separated teams that function primarily in online settings.

When I first integrated teamwork into my courses, I think I was a little naïve to think that things would naturally come together, as everyone was working toward similar educational outcomes. What I've found is that I needed to be much more intentional when integrating teams into my courses.

First, I decide on team composition—I don't leave this up to my students. Before creating teams, I like to have a sense of my students in terms of biographical information and academic work. Although it can be hard to tell, using this information, I like to start forming groups by putting two strong students in each group. I think that increases the chances that workload will be shared.

Next, I require students to complete a team agreement where they have to intentionally think about how their teams will function. So, as a part of this agreement, they are required to identify roles and responsibilities for each team member, share contact information and decide how team communication will take place, set rules for how work will be completed and timelines for this work and what happens when something goes wrong, and so on. Because something will likely go wrong. So, it's important to think about how to scaffold that team experience and help them to start thinking about how successful teams operate.

Then, I check in with each team to see how things are going; I hold online office hours so they can get any answers answered, and then I offer general my support if needed.

Students seem to appreciate the structure that the team agreement provides. Since using the team agreements and intentional team composition, the number of group issues that I get asked to help resolve has decreased.

After implementing this team approach, my students shared that they also wanted to have the opportunity to evaluate each other. So, in my most recent implementation, instead of requiring each team to complete a specific evaluation, I've asked students to develop a method for evaluating both their own participation and their teammates' participation and contributions in the project. One other requirement that I've asked students to include as they complete their projects is to use free project management software. My thought this will help them gain more transferable skills moving forward with academic work and professional life.

Overall, I think the key is to help students see the importance of completing the project and helping them feel supported. So, if you can introduce the project with a little background information as to why this meaningful for them can go a long way! Then, be sure to let your students know they aren't alone as they complete the project—online learning can be a lonely place.

I hope you found this information helpful!

[Closing]
A huge thank you goes out to our guest speaker, Adrie, for taking the time to share her story and ideas - and thank you, to our listeners, for taking the time to tune in to this episode. Please be sure to check back for new releases and if you have ideas or stories you would like to share, please email the innovative learning team at innovativelearningteam@purdue.edu. Our music credit for this episode goes to bensound.com.