Team-Based Learning in a Zen Buddhism Philosophy Course
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Introduction
The benefits of team-based learning are an acknowledged fact in the scholarship of teaching and learning. While my project addresses the former, it also focuses on how team-based learning itself might demonstrate or be an adequate representation of significant concepts discussed within the course content.

The Question
What does it mean to ask, “Did teamwork itself represent essential Zen Buddhist concepts?”
Example: sunyata (emptiness).

At its core, this terms points to the
(a.) Deep interconnection of all things, in the many ways we can understand things as interconnected.

(b.) The fact that what something or an event is, or what they can mean, is not final. Rather, phenomena can be recontextualized and seen through different perspectives. The latter is radicalized in Chan/Zen.

(c.) In Buddhism, emptiness also implies the promise of finding new and more productive ways of interconnecting with the environment in which we participate. This typically involves the flourishing of each of the individual entities. This links back to (a) and (b.)

My hope is that, beyond the contemplation of the relevance of the above idea, that the teams could see how they were actually instantiating these sorts of ideas.

Methodology
All 17 students from the course Zen Buddhism participated in the project (Fall 2013).

Each student:
- participated in two teamwork projects (based on particular prompts)
- completed a short essay and a longer essay that did not necessarily have to draw on the group work
- completed a final reflective paper about the benefits and problems with team-based learning, with an eye for whether or not it serves as a faithful representation of Zen Buddhist ideas and beliefs (serves as a quasi-survey)

The groups remained the same throughout the semester. Each group presented the results of their discussion. Each member of the group spoke. Other groups then raised questions.

Beyond observation, the instructor also:

- analyzed final reflection papers to gather evidence about whether the students were able to recognize the teamwork itself as an instantiation of foundational concepts found in Zen Buddhist philosophy
- is in the process of reviewing papers for patterns that might display an improvement in general conceptual understanding because of teamwork

References: Jelinek (2013), Sweet & Michaelsen (2012), Thomason (1990)

Conclusions
1. The teamwork demonstrated all around understanding, application, and criticism of the concepts (critical thinking).

2. Hypothesis: even if lecture leads to the production of excellent student papers that demonstrate understanding, application, and criticism, the teamwork exercise includes a number of additional educational benefits (for example: development of empathy, increased capacity to recognize the complexity of a problem, greater variety of examples, clarity in speaking).

3. Each of the four teams also demonstrated: (a.) individual member responsibility and engagement (b.) a fluid and respectful questioning/challenging of both members within the groups, and the groups of each other.

4. The individual reflection and survey somewhat verified that the team experience itself represented essential ideas of Zen Buddhism. This was also discussed in class.

5. Note: The majority of the students knew each other before this course, wanted to be in this course, and many of them knew me. This is going to influence the productivity and commitment to teamwork. Repeating this exercise in conditions that are not like the former is an important next step.