Team building isn't just movie magic

The season of the summer blockbuster movie is upon us, and, at the same time, the hype machine for the next *Star Wars* movie is in turbo drive. One of my favorite aspects of many of these movies is the formation of a team. I love watching individuals move from being suspicious of everyone they meet to developing dependency to forming real trust and a sense of responsibility for one another.

Whether they are coming together for one last big heist or to save the galaxy from certain destruction, the motley crew of jewel thieves or action heroes or half-alien/half-human desperadoes almost always manages to transcend individual interests to save the day — or at least outwit a greedy antagonist.

In the mid-1960s, psychologist Bruce Tuckman developed a framework to describe four stages of team development, and learning facilitators sometimes use this model to help learning teams explore the human dynamics of collaboration. Interestingly, teams in movies often go through the same stages.

Forming. In the first stage of team development, individual members come together willingly. They are guarded, curious, and polite in their interactions. Teams at this stage often rely on a

•

Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@ learningforward.org) is director of communications for Learning Forward.

leader to guide their work. When Luke, Obi-Wan, Han Solo, Chewbacca, and Princess Leia first work together in *Star Wars,* they demonstrate elements of the forming stage. While they are willing to collaborate, they have their own interests, and aren't entirely open about everything they know that influences their engagement in the team effort.

Storming. At the second stage, teams engage in more conflict. They may feel stuck and push against perceived authority as they try to advance toward their goals. While guidelines and procedures help a forming team take shape, members of a storming team may be jockeying for power or may quit. Think about how many times the characters in the first *Star Wars* movie rebel against those who exert leadership or leave to explore their own interests — even though the crew comes together at the right times to achieve their goals.

Norming. Members of a team working at this stage have developed trust and offer support to one another as they improve their skills to achieve their goals. The characters in the movie *Ocean's Eleven* spend a lot of time practicing their tasks and responsibilities to pull off a casino heist, feeling an apparent accountability toward one another and collaborating for the best outcomes. Since members of this team have worked together before, it isn't surprising that they

function fairly quickly as a more mature collective unit.

Performing. When teams reach the performing stage, "they work collaboratively and interdependently, share leadership, and perform at high levels" (Richardson, 2005). Despite their rocky road to cohesion, the superheroes in *The Avengers* ultimately battle as a well-functioning team in high-pressure circumstances, supporting one another to achieve victory and save the day.

Obviously, teams in movies are formed and motivated in different ways than teams in schools. However, maybe the season of seeking solace in the air-conditioned movie theater offers leading learners the opportunity to bolster their understanding of human dynamics in teams by watching movies with a different lens.

REFERENCE

Richardson, J. (2005, November/ December). Transform your group into a team. *Tools for Schools, 9*(2), 2. Available at www.learningforward. org/docs/tools-for-learning-schools/ tools11-05.pdf. ■