Case Study
Prof. X is looking for a way to increase students' learning in her course. She's decided to try several new active learning strategies in class because she's heard colleagues discuss how active learning both engages students and supports deep learning.

Her first attempt didn't go well. She took a component of the next homework assignment and asked students to work on it and talk with each other about the assignment. Students didn't seem on task and there was lots of grumbling about the professor not bothering to teach them anything – they had to learn everything on their own. X decided that this was just an example of students getting used to a new approach to learning so she decided to try it again. This time she put students in groups. She handed out a worksheet that required students read a passage and answer some questions about it. As she stood at the podium, she noticed several students appeared to be doing the work individually. Some students were talking animatedly about the questions and others were chatting, checking phones, and generally off task.

Now what does she do? X is going to try this again, but she wants to identify the root of the problem, address it, and then build a new learning activity that will engage all of her students.

Task
Analyze the following explanations for the lack of student buy-in/preponderance of social loafing.

- Individually, rank the following explanations and next steps according to what you would recommend to Prof. X. Be prepared to explain your rank ordering.
- As a group,
  - discuss the top choice of each person and the features that make different options appropriate for different contexts.
  - generate additional ideas for addressing lack of buy-in or social loafing.

1) The most likely root of this problem is lack of context for the active learning strategy. X needs to explain to students how this activity builds upon what has come before it in the course (e.g., readings, lectures, previous activities) and explain to student why and how this activity will help students learn the material or be able apply the course content. The right context helps students see the applicability of the activity which, in turn, builds buy-in and engagement.

2) Students aren't engaged in the learning experiences because teams are being held accountable instead of individuals. She needs to find a way to hold each individual accountable. One potential solution is for the instructor to give a quiz at the beginning of the next class period with questions based on the activity. Each individual will be accountable for learning the material.

3) There's a lack of buy-in and participation because no one is leading the group. To be successful, she needs to ensure everyone has a role to play in the activity. Perhaps there should be a team manager, a reporter, a scribe, and a timer. Also, she needs to make sure that students know the amount of time they have to complete the task and what they’ll have to deliver at the end of that time.

4) There’s a lack of buy-in and participation because the activities aren’t at the appropriate level of challenge. They may be too easy, causing some groups to “whip through them”, or they may be too difficult, causing some individuals/groups to give up before they’ve even begun. X needs to think about the background students have to work with (e.g., from reading, lectures, prior knowledge, etc) and make sure that the background provides sufficient preparation for students to be challenged, but not overwhelmed. X may also need to help students understand that struggling is part of the learning process.