Case #1

You are in a lab work group with three other people: Adnan, Dan, and Chris. The experience so far has been incredibly frustrating. The group does not mesh well and everyone seems to be very checked out. Adnan and Chris tend to dominate the delegation of work while you and Dan contribute but don’t take on leadership roles. On top of personality differences, there have been many miscommunications. Chris sends the group texts via iMessage, but Dan does not receive them because he doesn’t have a smart phone. You have gotten into the habit of forwarding the texts to Dan, but sometimes you forget. Group meetings are also difficult because Dan doesn’t have a laptop and can’t participate.

Your group is meeting in a residence hall study room, as usual. Dan is 10 minutes late when you realize that you never forwarded him the text telling him the new time of the meeting.

Adnan lets out an exasperated sigh and says “This is ridiculous. We should just do the whole thing ourselves. The guy is always late, barely contributes, and can’t even do work when he gets here. What’s the point?”

Chris agrees and adds that the group should talk to the TA about Dan not pulling his weight.

You understand their frustration, but also think they’re not being completely understanding.

Possible questions to start your dialogue:

1. What are the issues in this case?
2. What might be some possible solutions?
3. What is the best way to handle personality differences in group work without losing the educational benefits of group projects?
Case #2 (adapted from CIRTL Network)

Joe, Marie, Anna, and Brandon are together in a group during lab.

Joe, the unspoken leader of the group, was concerned. He was not sure how they would be able to carry out the titration successfully. "I just don't know how we're going to do this," he said. Marie looked around the room and saw that they were lagging behind the other groups, who were already mixing their solutions. She spoke up. "Well, when I was doing the reading," she said, "there was a note in the sidebar that said that when you're doing a titration, you should add titrant slowly near the endpoint. That way, when the solution changes color, it is easier to tell how much titrant was added."

Joe looked at her with doubt. Could she be right? He didn't want to rely on Marie's word alone. "Adam!" he called to their TA.

Adam came over to the group. "Do you have a question?"

"Well," said Joe, "We read in the book that we should add titrant slowly near the endpoint, so that when the solution changes color, we can accurately determine how much titrant was added. Is that true?"

"Good memory, Joe," said Adam, clapping Joe on the shoulder. "That's right. You're an asset to your group." He turned towards the other members of the group. "It's always important to pay attention when you're reading. Now, you need to get started with the titration in order to finish before the end of class. Let me know if you have any other questions."

Anna and Brandon looked at each other uncomfortably as the TA left. Joe had just stolen credit for Marie's answer. It wasn't the first time he had done this.

Marie glared at Joe and wondered if she would ever be able to break into what she heard others refer to as “the old boy’s club.”

Joe wondered why he felt such tension in the group. If he didn’t take initiative, no one else would.

Questions for consideration:

1. What are the issues in this case?
2. Why did the TA automatically give Joe individual credit for observations that he suggested came from the group?
3. What might be some possible solutions?