



The Learning Institute

# Supporting group working: collaborative learning

## Overview

Research shows that group working is an important way of supporting effective learning though only if it is thoughtfully managed. This CPD task seeks to support practitioners by helping them to understand some key principles of effective collaborative group working and how these might be applied.

## Target audience

e.g. Teaching Assistant +

## Duration

Approximately 1 hour

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## Introduction

Very often in your role you may be required to arrange your learners into groups in order to support them and the learning experience, but do you ever question how effective group work is in optimising the learning opportunity?

Group work can be an effective method to motivate learners, encourage active learning, and develop key critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills. However, without careful planning and facilitation, group work can often frustrate learners and practitioners and not achieve the desired outcomes.

This CPD will help you understand the differences between cooperative working and collaborative learning. It will help you to reflect on current practices and show you ways that you can help to make collaborative group work an effective learning experience.

## Objectives

- To understand the difference between cooperative learning and collaborative learning
- To know some strategies that can support effective collaborative working
- To support personal reflection on the use of group working

## Resources

Internet access to following:

- Co-operation vs collaboration [article] available at [https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative\\_Learning](https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative_Learning)
- Dylan Wiliam: Collaborative learning [video] available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM)

## Task 1: Understanding the terms associated with group working

This task will help you to understand the different terms associated with group work.

### What is group work?

In its broadest definition and in a school context, group work involves learners working together on set tasks, in or out of the classroom and includes:

- Any learning tasks or activities that require learners to work in groups
- Any formal assessment tasks that require learners to work in groups.

Group sizes can vary from pairs to large groups of learners.

## What do the terms co-operative learning and collaborative learning mean?

When it comes to learners working together in groups, the terms collaborative learning and cooperative learning are often used interchangeably. However, there are key differences; with collaborative learning, learners make individual progress alongside others, whereas co-operative learning involves more inherent interdependence.

In a classroom these group arrangements would appear differently and you would hear and witness different behaviours.

Read page 3 of the article by Chris Watkins, available at [https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative\\_Learning](https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative_Learning).

- Identify the features which distinguish collaborative learning from 'group work' or 'co-operative learning'.

Prof Dylan Wiliam suggests that collaborative learning involves "group goals, and individual accountability".

Watch the video film clip (02:44), available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM).

- What does Prof Wiliam mean when he refers to a 'jigsaw group'?
- Why does Prof Wiliam believe that collaborative learning is so powerful?
- Use an internet search to find a definition for the term 'social loafing'. What strategy does Prof Wiliam suggest that can prevent this from happening?

## Task 2: How can effective collaborative group working be enabled?

Now that an understanding of types of group work has been established, read pages 3-5 of the article by Chris Watkins, available at [https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative\\_Learning](https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative_Learning) and identify the strategies that support effective group working. Make notes on the following:

- What is meant by 'decomposable' tasks?
- In collaborative group work why is the use of 'effective questioning' so important?
- Why is the arrangement/layout of the classroom/learning environment important?
- What consideration should be given to the social grouping of the learners?
- What can practitioners do to better support learners for collaborative learning?

## Task 3: Reflection on learning

Note down your responses to the following questions:

- What knowledge did I already have that has been refreshed by this CPD?

- How has this CPD developed my knowledge and understanding?
- How can I apply what I now know to my practice?
- Consider how you can record your goals/targets so that you will make use of them when you are able to return to the classroom.

## Sources

Education Scotland (2016) *Dylan William: Collaborative learning*. 15 July. Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqBNWEQmBRM) (Accessed: 3 April 2020)

University of Sydney (2018) *What is group work?* Available at: [https://www.sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/groupwork/what.shtml](https://www.sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/groupwork/what.shtml) (Accessed: 3 April 2020)

Watkins, C. (2009) *Co-operation vs collaboration*. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative\\_Learning](https://www.academia.edu/21734952/Collaborative_Learning) (Accessed: 3 April 2020)

## Further reading

Burnett, D. (2016) 'Does working as a group actually help us learn?', *The Guardian*, 9 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/09/does-working-as-a-group-actually-help-us-learn> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

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