

Collaborative Learning Guide

Collaborative learning gives the responsibility of the learning to the students by using groups and pairs of students to fulfill a task or assignment within the classroom. The Common Core Math Practice Standard 3 calls for students at all grades to listen or read the arguments of others, decide whether they make sense, and ask useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments.

Creating Effective Collaborative Activities

Within a Collaborative Group.....

- ◆ Is the activity highly structured physically, spatially and temporally?
- ◆ Do students know the rationale for the activity?
- ◆ What are the teacher's academic and behavioral expectations of the students?
- ◆ How will the learning activity affect motivation?
- ◆ Does the activity accommodate various group speeds?
- ◆ How long will the activity take?
- ◆ Is there an opportunity for students to process how the group functioned and the learning that occurred during the activity?
- ◆ Does the structure of the activity give students time to process the new information before they are asked to respond?

- ◆ Students are invested in their own learning.
- ◆ Learners actively participate.
- ◆ Teachers become learners at times, and learners sometimes teach.
- ◆ Respect is given to every member.
- ◆ The project / question should be of interest and challenging to the students.
- ◆ Diversity is celebrated and all contributions are valued.
- ◆ Students learn skills for resolving conflicts when they arise.
- ◆ Members draw upon their past experience and knowledge.
- ◆ Goals are clearly identified and used as a guide.
- ◆ Research tools such as internet access are made available.

Size

Smallest group is 2.

Largest recommended group is 6.

Smaller groups will require fewer social skills and will work more quickly.

Larger groups generally generate more ideas, deal better with complex ideas and create fewer group reports for the teacher to process.

Formation

Heterogeneous grouping with regards to academic achievement, task orientation, ability and learning style can be used depending on the subject matter or collaboration technique used. If the project is long or detailed then the support of a stronger academic student in each group will help complete the project.

Student self selection is generally not successful, although students can provide input for the teacher to consider.

Random assignment promotes the idea that everyone is expected to work with everyone else at some point. Random is best used if the task is of short duration.

Duration

Groups created for longer projects should be structured carefully. Groups that stay together for long periods (4-6 weeks) are more likely to form stronger bonds, develop more complex collaborative skills and can tackle more complex tasks.

Groups should stay together long enough to feel successful, but not so that they become counter-productive.

Avoid breaking groups up because they are having trouble functioning since the group will feel unsuccessful and transfer that to the next group. They need to persevere.

Possible Student Roles Within the Group

Facilitator

Keeps group on task and verifies that all contribute.

Recorder

Takes notes on important thoughts expressed in the group.
Writes final summary.

Reporter

Shares summary of group with large group. Speaks for the group, not just personal view.

Materials Manager

Picks up, distributes, collects, turns in, or puts away materials.

Time Keeper

Keeps track of time and reminds group how much time is left.

Checker

Checks for accuracy and clarity of thinking during discussions.
Checks written work and tracks points.

Group Management Tips

Noise

Develop and practice a "QUIET or Zero-noise" signal.
Brainstorm what that would be with the students.
Practice appropriate internal and external voices.

Deadlines and Task Structure

Give students specific tasks to finish within a predetermined time limit. Use a timer.

Instructions

Show, don't tell, instructions (have a group model the steps).
Have students tell each other the instructions to make sure they understand prior to starting the task.

Questions

Answer team questions only. Individual questions should be handled within the team. Use the "3 Then Me" technique.

Circulate

Use proximity. Monitor discussions to check for understanding and to be aware of collaborative skills that may need to be addressed.



Collegial Discussion

Common Core State Standards for Speaking and Listening item 1 (CCS– SL.1) calls for students to initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborating discussions with diverse partners. They are to work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussion and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed. CCS– SL.1 also calls for students to follow rules for collegial discussions. Collegial discussions are mutually respectful conversations between student colleagues in a group or classroom environment.

Discussion Guidelines and Skills

When speaking, participants strive to

- ♦ sustain a main idea
- ♦ be original with interesting, thought-provoking ideas.
- ♦ have quality in their comments.
- ♦ include textual references– the more specific the quotation, with reference to page and paragraph numbers, the better.
- ♦ make reference to other works.
- ♦ maintain the accuracy of their comments.
- ♦ question for greater understanding.

When listening, participants strive to

- ♦ listen to other students and not be “checked out”.
- ♦ see how the comments fit...follow the flow of the discussion.
- ♦ be able to reference previous comments.
- ♦ listen for greater understanding.
- ♦ wait patiently for the speaker to finish before sharing ideas.

In a collegial conversation, participants

- ♦ are consistent in participation.
- ♦ show leadership— students help others to enter the discussion.
- ♦ show empathy.
- ♦ have the ability to learn and adjust to the dynamics of the class.
- ♦ incorporate politeness and respect for all members of the class.
- ♦ maintain eye contact and call others by their names.
- ♦ show patience with the process. (It takes some time to develop a group dynamic where everyone feels at ease.)
- ♦ demonstrate preparedness— books and articles are marked, responses are written, questions are prepared.
- ♦ students are willing to state own ideas even if different from those of other students or the teacher.

Discussion Sentence Stems.....

Sentence starters for students to facilitate a safe and cooperative classroom or group discussion.

Agreement

- ♦ “I agree with ____ because ____.”
- ♦ “I like what ____ said because ____.”
- ♦ “I agree with ____ because ____; then on the other hand ____.”

Disagreement

- ♦ “I disagree with ____ because ____.”
- ♦ “I’m not sure I agree with that because ____.”
- ♦ “I can see that ____; however, I disagree with (or can’t see) ____.”

Clarifications

- ♦ “Could you please repeat that for me?”
- ♦ Paraphrase what you heard and ask, “Could you explain a bit more, please?”
- ♦ “I’m not sure I understood you when you said _____. Could you say more about that?”
- ♦ “Is there evidence for the position?”
- ♦ “How does that support our work/mission at ____?”

Confirmation

- ♦ “I hear ____.”
- ♦ “I believe ____.”
- ♦ “I discovered ____.”
- ♦ “I learned that ____.”

Confusion

- ♦ “I don’t understand ____.”
- ♦ “I am confused about ____.”
- ♦ “Can you explain that another way?”
- ♦ “I have a question about ____.”

Extension

- ♦ “I was thinking about what ____ said, and I was wondering what if ____.”
- ♦ “This makes me think ____.”
- ♦ “I want to know more about ____.”
- ♦ “Now I am wondering ____.”
- ♦ “Can you tell me more about ____.”

Review

- ♦ “I want to go back to what ____ said.”
- ♦ “I like ____.”
- ♦ “I noticed that ____.”

