Collaborative Learning

1GN1T3 + 1MPACT

Yr 10 + 11 + 12

Definition

A collaborative learning approach involves students working together on activities or learning tasks in a group small enough to ensure that everyone participates. Students in the group may work on separate tasks contributing to a common overall outcome, or work together on a shared task.

Purpose

Collaboration benefits students because they learn from peers as well as develop other learner attributes. Research indicates students make an additional 5 months progress, on average, over the course of an academic year, when collaboratively learning. There is some evidence that collaboration can be supported with competition between groups, but this is not always necessary. Most of the positive approaches include the promotion of talk and interaction between learners.

Pedagogical strategies & examples

Have different strategies to form groups and rotate them.

- Allowing students to form their own groups (useful if they know each other or for longer-term groups)
- Choosing heterogenous groups (could be based on student interest, readiness, experience, personality, prior group skills, etc)
- Choosing homogenous groups
- Randomising groups using a name generator or group card
- Allowing students to choose their own pairs, and then pairing the pairs
- Identifying particular features (eg interest in topic) and asking students to form groups based on that particular feature

Promoting structured discussion and interaction between students.

- Think-pair-share (students think about a response, talk in a pair, then share back to the class)
- Snowball (student share ideas or responses in pairs, with one idea chosen and then shared in 4s, then 8s, etc)
- Mentor groups (a specific mentor is assigned to a group to support them)
- Buzz groups (students discuss responses in small groups rather than with the class)
- Concentric circles (students stand in 2 circles facing each other. Students discuss responses or ideas for a set amount of time then the outer circle shifts one person to the left and the discussions begin again with new pairs)
- Peer tutoring (students teach each other specific concepts)
- Affinity mapping (groups write all ideas down on individual sticky notes, one idea per note, then discuss how to organise their notes)
- Fish bowl (students are assigned to "outside" the fishbowl or "inside" the fishbowl. Outside students observe and take notes while inside students discuss)
- Backchannel discussion (set up ways for groups to discuss that are not in the primary discourse, such as group messages)
- Aysnchoronous voice (set up a way for groups to contribute ideas as they occur, such as a letterbox for scribbled notes, then review the ideas together)
- Rotating group roles such as speaker, recorder, constructive criticiser, idea generator, refiner, etc.

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Strategies continued

Setting tasks or activities that benefit from collaboration.

- Learning by explaining to each other
- Peer tutoring
- Expert jigsaw
- Open-ended, real-world problems
- Tasks that benefit from varied perspectives, interpretations or explanations
- Include a variety of collaborative learning tasks (eg laboratory work, debates, and collaborative writing)

Effective practice

Effective practice is:

- All students, particularly students with low prior attainment, are supported to fully participate.
- The make-up of pairings and groups is carefully considered
- Teachers promote good practice in collaboration – for example modelling high quality discussions so that collaborative activities are productive
- Teachers carefully monitor collaborative activities and support students that are struggling or not contributing

The physical or virtual environment supports collaboration.

- Set up areas where students can work together, including grouped tables, open floor spaces and/or flexible furniture
- Make group-size resource kits for students to access.

Collaborative norms are developed and/or reinforced.

- Have groups identify and work towards group goals
- Support students to identify appropriate norms for their group
- Build trust with mini-activities and challenges
- Support groups to work through issues
- Support stress-reducing benefits of group work such as humour
- Change groups regularly to ensure people contribute in different ways
- Teach social and emotional skills necessary for collaboration
- Teach group roles for students to rotate through and get experience with, such as speaker, recorder, constructive criticiser, idea generator, refiner, etc.

Further reading or references

- Dillenbourg P. (1999) What do you mean by collaborative learning?. In P. Dillenbourg (Ed) Collaborative-learning: Cognitive and Computational Approaches. (pp.1-19). Oxford: Elsevier
- Seyed, M. L. and Ghodsi, M (2012) Benefits of collaborative learning. Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences , 31, 486-490
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