



When you work in TV, it's such a group effort, it's not about you.

Kylie Minogue

If you put yourself in a group of people you cannot work with it's obviously going to be a disaster.

David Cronenberg

Collaborate

Work together on the same task bringing individual strengths to bear.

How It Works

Two or more pupils work and learn together on the same task but take on different roles and responsibilities. If all pupils are doing exactly the same thing then it's cooperation not collaboration. Set this up by clarifying task success criteria; by defining task roles and by making sure pupils recognise the diversity within their task group. Who is the subject expert? Who'll best facilitate? check? report? record? keep time? and manage materials?

Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

If you're considering collaboration in class don't do it for the sake of it. Make sure it's a learning task that needs shared effort. Pupils will then need to learn and master a range of life skills: listening, questioning, decision making, negotiation, managing conflict, supporting each other, resilience, patience, team spirit. Get it right - and do it for the right purpose - and there is nothing like collaboration for preparing your pupils for their working lives.

1. Group or Not?

Set up a group task if you want to focus on the skills it fosters AND if the task will benefit from shared, diverse effort. For example if the required product is more complex and time intensive than any single pupil could handle.

2. Clear Criteria

Clearly define what the group is to do and what it has to make. Be specific. e.g.: 'Make a Poster' needs greater detail: 'Include an inspiring title; all relevant facts, at least 3 diagrams, 3 questions and a summary paragraph'.

3. Clear Rules

Set out the non-negotiables such as: 'Everyone involved and accountable for their contribution (no passengers); finished within 30 minutes; stick to task roles etc.'

Applications

- Keeping the learning environment organised
- Sharing out large pieces of text
- Learning aspects of a larger topic
- Collaborative spellings
- Making a physical learning summary
- Preparing a presentation/performance
- Creating a video, audio, web summary

Be sensitive to pupils who do not naturally like group work. Arrange essential individual tasks within a collaborative context.

Extensions, Adaptations, Variations

- Random groups based on personality
- Mixed age/year group collaboration
- Teacher/pupil collaboration
- Pupil/parent collaboration
- Collaboration with industry/arts/media
- Specialist roles such as encourager, questioner.

For younger learners, focus on paired work, turn-taking and the core skills of communicating.

Test It Out

Set up groups of 3. Task the group with meeting a shared spelling target (it's not score/10 for 3 individuals but score/30 for the trio). It's in each pupil's interest to help the other two learn. Have trios compete against each other.

Further details and examples in the premium PowerPoint.

4. Task Roles

Define and allocate necessary task roles: Facilitator, Scribe, Checker, Subject Expert, Time-Keeper. Conflict Resolver - whatever the task, the context and the pupils most need.

5. Regulation

Build in Meta-Cognition and Self-Regulation: Ask each group to continually ask, 'Are we producing what we should be? Are we being effective?' and then to adjust their working practices accordingly.

6. Assessment

Once the task is complete ask groups to evaluate their process and their product: How effectively did they work together; how successful was what they produced? In both cases, what might need to change?