

Facilitating collaborative learning

with Primary Connections

[Click here to download posters that support a collaborative learning approach.](#)

Why collaborative learning?

Collaborative learning is one of the 6 guiding principles of the Primary Connections approach to teaching science through inquiry.

Working in collaborative teams benefits student learning outcomes, the development of science inquiry skills and enhances students' ability to work effectively within a group.

Students' learning benefits from opportunities to:

- observe new ways of thinking
- consider multiple perspectives
- encounter new vocabulary in context
- build on one another's ideas
- discuss and debate ideas
- revise and rethink their reasoning.

This, in turn, also supports the development of students science inquiry skills, as it allows them to:

- ask questions in context
- share, justify and refine predictions
- process and analyse in meaningful ways
- compare and evaluate conclusions and claims
- refine their science communication skills.

The development of collaborative skills aligns to descriptions in the Australian Curriculum: English, and to the [Australian Curriculum General Capability 'Personal and Social Capability'](#).

By experiencing the benefits of working in a team, students begin to value the opportunity for collaboration.

They learn to:

- communicate effectively
- make decisions
- negotiate and resolve conflict
- appreciate diverse perspectives
- become resilient and adaptive
- build confidence.

All of these attributes are features of the Australian Curriculum General Capability 'Personal and Social Capability', and can be found on the [Personal and Social Capabilities continuum](#).

An approach to facilitating collaborative learning effectively

The first step towards teaching students to work collaboratively is to consider team structure, the team roles that will be assigned to each student, and the team skills and discussions skills students will need to develop in order to participate in and contribute to the team.

Team structure

Teachers make decisions about team composition according to their context and the needs of their students. Here are some recommendations and things to consider when organising teams for optimal learning.

- Team members are decided by the teacher.
- Teams should be heterogenous in terms of gender, cultural background, ability etc.
- Teams should have the opportunity to work together for at least two learning experiences so that students gain more practise with conflict resolution and communication skills.
- In Foundation – Year Two, teams ideally consist of two members.
- In Year 3 – 6, teams ideally consist of three members.
- Across the course of the year students should be afforded opportunities to work with as many other students as possible.

Team Roles

When working in teams, students are assigned a role. This provides them an opportunity to contribute to and take responsibility within the team. Team roles are structured around organisational tasks, such as managing resources, rather than learning tasks, such as creating a representation. This is because tasks such as creating a representation contribute the development of a student's knowledge, understanding and skills in a learning area. Therefore, assigning the task of creating a representation to just one student in the team means that the learning of other team members is not recorded as accurately as it could be.

In Primary Connections resources, the roles have been entitled Manager, Speaker and Director.

However, it is not the name of the role that is important, but rather the responsibilities that the student fulfills while in that role. A teacher might modify or create new roles based on their context and the needs of their students, but it is recommended that team roles be organisational in nature.

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Manager

The Manager is responsible for collecting and returning the team's equipment and reporting damaged or broken equipment to the teacher.

Speaker

The Speaker seeks help from the teacher or another team's Speaker if required. They report suggested answers and solutions back to their team.

It is important to note that when discussing an investigation with a team, the teacher would expect all members to contribute to the discussion, and that the Speaker's role is not one of 'reporter'; each team member should be able to speak to the team's investigation process, claims, evidence and reasoning.

Director (recommended for Year 3–Year 6 students)

The Director is responsible for making sure the team understands the investigation, and that the team completes all of the components in the correct order and manner.

Team skills and discussion skills

Students may have differing experiences of working in a team and/ or a different concept of what effective team work looks like. Therefore, all students need some form of guidance and support to ensure they are valuing the same skills, and see those skills as important to the success of the team.

The Primary Connections approach focuses on social skills that will support students to work in collaborative teams and communicate more effectively.

Suggested team skills:

- Move into your teams quickly and quietly
- Speak softly
- Stay with your team
- Take turns
- Perform your role.

Suggested discussion skills:

- Listen when others speak
- Ask questions of each other
- Criticise ideas, not people
- Discuss all ideas before selecting one.

The skills may need to be explicitly modelled and taught to students. For example you might focus on one specific skill at a time and ask students to regularly reflect thoughtfully about their contributions to team work. You might also reinforce these skills by displaying them in a prominent place in the classroom.