

Facilitating collaborative learning

with Primary Connections

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Introduction

Students working in collaborative teams is a key feature of the Primary Connections approach.

By working in collaborative teams students are able to:

- communicate and compare their ideas with one another
- build on one another's ideas
- discuss and debate these ideas
- revise and rethink their reasoning
- present their final team understanding through multi-modal representations.

When students are given regular opportunities to work together, they can develop effective group learning skills. This takes time, as the skills of collaboration do not come naturally to most students. Teachers are encouraged to group students in ways that provide opportunities to experience a range of roles and responsibilities.

The development of these collaborative skills aligns to descriptions in the Australian Curriculum: English, and to the Australian Curriculum General Capability 'Personal and Social Capability'.

Team structure

The first step towards teaching students to work collaboratively is to organise the team composition, roles and skills. Consider the following ideas when planning for collaborative learning:

- Assign students to teams rather than allowing them to choose partners.
- Vary the composition of each team. Give students opportunities to work with others who might be of a different ability level, gender or cultural background.
- Keep teams together for two or more lessons so that students have enough time to experience working together successfully.
- If you cannot divide the students in your class into teams of three (years 3-6), form two teams of two students rather than one team of four. The smaller the group size, the more optimal for learning.
- Keep a record of the students who have worked together as a team so that by the end of the year each student has worked with as many others as possible or encourage students to keep records in their science journals.

Team roles

It is recommended that students are assigned roles within their team (see below).

Each team member has a specific role but all members share leadership responsibilities.

Each member is accountable for the performance of the team and should be able to explain how the team obtained its results.

Students are therefore encouraged to be concerned with the performance of all team members.

It is important to rotate team jobs regularly so that all students have an opportunity to perform different roles.

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In F - Year 2, teams consist of two students: Manager and Speaker. In Year 3 - Year 6, teams consist of three students: Director, Manager and Speaker.

Each member of the team could wear something that identifies them as belonging to that role, such as a wristband, badge, or colour-coded peg or sticker. This makes it easier for you to identify the role of each student and it is easier for the students to remember what they and their team mates should be doing.

Suggested roles:

Manager

The Manager is responsible for collecting and returning the team's equipment. The Manager also tells the teacher when equipment is damaged or broken. All team members are responsible for clearing up after an activity and getting the equipment ready to return to the equipment table.

Speaker

The Speaker is responsible for asking the teacher or another team's Speaker for help. If the team cannot resolve a question or decide how to follow a procedure, the Speaker is the only person who may leave the team and seek help. The Speaker shares any information they obtain with team members. The teacher may speak to all team members, not just to the Speaker. The Speaker is not the only person who reports to the class; each team member should be able to report on the team's results.

Director (Year 3–Year 6)

The Director is responsible for making sure that the team understands the team investigation and helps team members focus on each step. The Director is also responsible for offering encouragement and support. When the team has finished, the Director helps team members check that they have accomplished the investigation successfully. The Director provides guidance but is not the team leader.

Team skills

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

Students could practise the following team skills throughout the year:

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

To help reinforce these skills, display enlarged copies of the team skills, team roles, and discussion skills in a prominent place in the classroom.