

Educational Psychology

Overview Guide

Collaborative learning approaches

What are collaborative learning approaches? Collaborative learning approaches are based on theories by Vygotski and Piaget which suggest that learning is naturally a social act. Collaborative learning approaches facilitate learning through social processes such as discussion, joint-problem solving and sharing perspectives and ideas. Various research studies indicate that groups of learning using collaborative approaches are able to share the load of challenging tasks, synthesize information and achieve higher levels of learning as a group than they would be able to individually.

Examples of collaborative learning approaches? Collaborative learning approaches can be applied to almost any task, content or theme. However, the task and content should be planned and structured in advance by the supervising adult, to ensure that group members share a clear understanding of the end goal. Collaborative learning tasks should be distinct from unstructured group work.

- **Question your partner (paired):** Pupils each generate a question for their partner based on the content of the current lesson up to that point. Pairs of pupils take it in turns to ask their partner their chosen question and generate a shared summary of the lesson content to feedback to the group.
Example: Pupils have just received input on 1920's American history. Pairs of pupils generate a question for each other about an assigned lesson topic/ concept (such as prohibition), with each pupil having the opportunity to answer their partner's question. Together, the pairs of pupils generate a summary of their topic/ concept and feedback to the wider group.
- **Fishbowl debate (groups of 3):** The class teacher generates a debate question/ statement based on a key concept from the current lesson. Each of the three pupils in a debate group are assigned a role; Those for [the statement], those against and a note taker. Each group engages in a short debate session and then presents their arguments for/ against to the wider group. The wider group votes on which side (for/against) presents the most convincing argument. A tally of the overall winning argument is kept by the teacher, with a winning side identified.

Creating successful collaboration: To create success, the class teacher should consider the following when planning and assigning collaborative learning tasks:

- Small group sizes (between 2-5) reduce the likelihood of some pupils struggling to participate.
- Focus on learning rather than competition. Whilst competition between groups is key, learning is the ultimate end goal.
- Well- structured and well-supported tasks: Clear task outcomes and regular check-ins from an adult helps facilitate greater learning, group cohesion and positive shared experiences.
- Modelling of group work skills (effective listening and discussion) by the teacher can increase successful learning.

Resources/ Further reading: Ideas for collaborative activities:

<https://teaching.cornell.edu/resource/examples-collaborative-learning-or-group-work-activities>

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development <https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html>