

Collaborative Groups

Collaborative Groups is a strategy that encourages small groups of students to learn and work together. The groups may range in size from pairs to as many as four students. If the groups are much larger than four, learners may “check out” rather than actively participating. When students work together in small groups, they have opportunities to share ideas and explore the thinking of others, as well as practice using important interpersonal skills. Groups may exist for short periods of time (a few minutes to a class period) or for longer (possibly the duration of a unit of study).

Some possible purposes of collaborative groups include:

- Help students clarify expectations for a given task and work together to complete it.
- Focus students’ attention.
- Allow students time to more deeply process information.
- Provide time for closure.

How to implement the strategy:

1. Be intentional about what students will do. Tasks should be well structured, expectations established, and groups must have adequate time to work.
2. Decide how students will be grouped. Ability grouping should be used sparingly. Students may be grouped according to interest, their birthday month, the colors they are wearing, alphabetically, or even by randomly picking names from a hat. When ability levels are considered, it is best to form mixed-ability groups.
3. Spend time listening to and interacting with groups as they work.
4. Debrief the small group discussions/work by bringing the class back together. If groups are established long-term, make time for periodic debriefing.

Adapted from:

- Marzano, R., Pickering, D. & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*, Alexandria, VA. ASCD.