

Co-operative learning

Students working together

What is co-operative learning?

Co-operative learning is an instructional method where students undertake defined roles within a small group to work towards a shared goal. Groups can be involved in a variety of activities to achieve learning outcomes. The emphasis on having a shared goal for all group members fosters teamwork and productive peer interaction. Co-operative learning offers opportunities for presenting both academic content and social skills. As such, it is an effective approach for students with learning and/or behaviour difficulties.

Essential components of co-operative learning

- Positive interdependence: working together towards a shared goal.
- Individual accountability: success based on individual learning outcomes.
- Group rewards: reinforce participation and achievement.
- Positive interactions: encouraging the work of peers within the group.
- Group processing: students interact to solve problems.
- Development of small group social skills: discussion within a group to reach consensus.
- Group diversity: range of abilities, characteristics and needs within groups.

Academic content

Elements of co-operative learning that support students with additional learning needs include:

- explicit teaching to introduce new skills
- opportunities for modelling and guided practice with feedback
- group assignments that encourage participation of reluctant students
- frequent feedback and monitoring to provide opportunities to make adjustments.

Social skills

It is crucial to assess and explicitly teach social skills for successful group work. Leadership, decision-making, communication and problem solving have been identified as important skills for co-operation with others. It may be beneficial to focus on specific skills at the start of each lesson, then model, prompt and reinforce successful skill use.

Behaviour

Discuss and establish guidelines for behaviour that are clear, consistent and positive. Include routines for group interaction and movement in the classroom.