

Working with others:
ideas from the key skills classroom

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This booklet contains some tips and ideas for teaching some of the skills needed to work with others. The booklet in itself is not intended to be a comprehensive course in the elements and learning outcomes of this skill. Please consult the Key Skills Framework for many other aspects of Working with Others.

Introduction

Children may work in groups in classrooms

But they very seldom work as groups (Ken Richardson)

Teachers recognise the value of developing in their students the skill of working with others. Research on co-operative learning goes back over 100 years and suggests that when students work together it has a positive impact on their achievement, self-esteem, motivation for learning, and on their thinking and reasoning skills. In addition to higher achievement, it also leads to more positive interpersonal relationships within the classroom. As such, Working with Others plays an important role in learning and in reaching collective and personal goals. It also helps learners gain some appreciation of the dynamics of groups and the social skills needed to engage in collaborative work. Learners begin to appreciate that working together can help motivation, release energy and capitalise on all the talents in a group.

Yet many Irish classrooms are structured largely around individualistic and competitive learning. And even when teachers organise students to work in groups they may still be working individually and/or competitively. This booklet offers some tips and ideas to help learners to really begin working with others. As with the other key skills, you will find lots of ways of linking this skill to the other skills. So check out the other booklets in this series and you will also find learning activities and other resources related to this skill at <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills>.

The key elements of this skill are set out below:

Working with Others
Working with others in a variety of contexts with different goals and purposes
Identifying, evaluating and achieving collective goals
Identifying responsibilities in a group and establishing practices associated with different roles in a group
Developing good relationships with others and a sense of well-being in the group
Acknowledging individual differences, negotiating and resolving conflicts
Checking progress, reviewing the work of the group, and personally reflecting on one's own contribution.

Differentiated teaching and working with others

Differentiation is *the process by which teachers provide opportunities for pupils to achieve their potential, working at their own pace through a variety of relevant learning activities* (Convery and Coyle 1993)

Not all students are alike. Teaching approaches need to be flexible and varied in recognition of students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests. Classroom teaching is a mix of whole class instruction, individual and group work. Tomlinson (2001) identifies three elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated: Content, Process and Product. Content refers to the learning tasks and materials used to support learning. Process refers to the learning strategies that are designed to foster differentiated instruction. In this regard, strategies for group work are essential. Product refers to the ways that students demonstrate or express their knowledge and understanding. This should allow varied means of expression and varied degrees of difficulty. Being confident in the use of a variety of strategies for group work is at the heart of successful differentiated teaching.

Why differentiate?

A 'one size fits all' approach to teaching does not work. Where teachers use differentiated instruction the following benefits have been observed

- Learner motivation improves.
- Differing learner needs are addressed.
- Inclusion of all learners is more evident.
- Learner self-esteem improves.
- Discipline problems reduce.
- Achievement improves.
- Collaborative learning is fostered.

How to make group work really work

Here are some ideas on how to set up and encourage effective groups.

Heterogenous members	<p>Avoid friendship groups. At the start student may object to being separated from their friends. Explain that the groups will change regularly.</p> <p>Keep groups small to begin with.</p>
Social skills need to be taught	Teachers must teach the skills needed for group work such as listening skills, leadership skills (shared and rotated), conflict resolution skills, how to give feedback, how to encourage each other, etc.
Ensure everyone feels accountable for their own work and for the work of the group	Teachers can ensure that the group is accountable while at the same time making sure that there is individual accountability, for example by randomly selecting one student to explain the group's answer.
Create positive interdependence	<p>The teacher structures work in such a way that students need each other in order to complete the task. Students know that they 'sink or swim together'.</p> <p>This can be achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ when the teacher sets a shared task or goal (e.g. agree a solution and make sure all group members can explain how it was arrived at), ▪ when resources are shared (e.g. one worksheet between each pair/small group), ▪ when group members have complementary roles ▪ when the teacher requests one end product and there is a shared reward or shared grade for the group.
Both the task and relationships are important	Cooperative learning groups try to increase members' learning <i>and</i> maintain good working relationships. Students need to be reminded to observe how they are succeeding with both.
Make time for group reflection/evaluation	The students need time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and how they are working together. Questions such as 'What worked well in our group today?' and 'How can we work better next time?' are useful.

(Adapted from *Cooperation in the Classroom*, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, revised 1991)

Assigning students to groups

Some helpful hints

- Assign the groups yourself. Each group should have a mix of abilities, gender, motivation levels, etc. Do not put students with their friends unless you have a good reason to do so. If students protest, explain that the groups will be changing later on so they will have opportunities to work with other groups.
- Start out with small groups (2 or 3) until students become skilful in group work.
- The shorter the time available, the smaller the learning group should be.
- Assign each student a job or role but rotate them frequently.
- Graduate the tasks so that there are some tasks that everyone can do with ease and some more challenging tasks or questions. That way, everyone can contribute something to the group.
- Make your expectations clear so that students know what you want them to do and how to behave.
- Agree ground rules.
- Observe and monitor students working.
- Teacher's role is to set the task, to keep students focused on the task, support students who are stuck on the task and give positive feedback.

Sample ground rules for co-operative learning

(It's best if the students agree their own)

- every group member is responsible for completing the task
- every group member is responsible for making sure all the group members know and understand the answers
- be open to others ideas
- take turns
- look at the speaker
- help each other
- no put downs
- criticize ideas, not people

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ use quiet voices ▪ include everyone and encourage everyone's participation in the work. 	
Key roles for co-operative group work	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Reader ▪ A Recorder ▪ A Reporter ▪ Checker (Sometimes called clarifier, paraphraser or summarizer). 	

These role cards can be cut out and used when assigning students their roles in group work. Remember, to keep groups small, to begin with. Three or four role cards usually work best. There is one blank role card which you might want to assign to a particular task.

READER Your task is to read the text for your group. Be sure to read slowly and ensure that everyone is listening before you start.	RECORDER Your task is to record the key points or answers that the group has agreed. Be sure to write them neatly so that they can be read by your Reporter and by the teacher.
REPORTER Your task is to report back from your group to the whole class and to the teacher. You must listen carefully and work closely with the Recorder in order to do a good job.	TIME KEEPER and KEEPER OF GOALS Your job is to keep an eye on the time and make sure that the group does not spend too long on one task and not have enough time to complete their work. You may also need to let them know when they are straying away from the task.
	CHECKER Your task is to make sure that everyone understands the questions and can explain the group's answers when the teacher asks. As the work moves along you should check that everyone is 'on board' and sometimes ask someone to summarise or paraphrase what has

	been said. This will help to check that everyone understands the work. When any member of the group is lost you will ask if another member can explain things to help them out.
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Social skills needed for group work

Effective small-group work requires preparation, and a number of preconditions have to be met for it to be effective. Firstly, students must be able to cooperate with one another and provide each other with feedback in a constructive way. A number of studies have found that while small-group work is positively related to achievement when group interaction is respectful and inclusive, use of group work is actually negatively related to achievement if group interaction is disrespectful or unequal. This can happen when students don't have the necessary social skills to interact positively with peers. Skills of sharing, turn-taking, communication, and listening cannot be taken for granted.

One simple strategy which can help develop listening skills is to ask students to paraphrase what another student has said before allowing them to contribute a new idea. Use **paraphrasing** to: avoid confusion (Let me see if I heard you right...), confirm understanding (Are you saying that...?), try to understand something from another's perspective (In other words, what you mean is...).

Other ways of teaching the social skills needed for successful group work include building a **T Chart** and keeping it on view in the classroom. To do this you write the name of the skill to be practiced at the top of a chart. Label the left side 'Looks like' and the right side 'Sounds like'. Then under each column ask the students to brainstorm examples for each side and write them down. This might look something like this.

Working Together	
<u>Looks like</u>	<u>Sounds like</u>
<i>everyone has a job</i> <i>people look involved</i>	<i>different voices talking</i> <i>might be movement</i>

looking at whoever is talking
listening attentively

having fun while learning

(Source: *Cooperation in the Classroom*, Johnson, Johnson and Holobec, 5:7, revised 1991)

Helpful phrases for group work

I think.... because (i.e. whenever someone makes a statement they must justify it.)

I agree/disagree because...

How can we back-up this idea with evidence?

I'm not sure what you mean.

Would you like me to go over that again?

Do I understand you correctly, are you saying....?

Here's a way to remember this...

I think that's an interesting point but we'd better stick with the question we're working on right now.

Let's look at the other side of the argument for a minute.

Let's summarise our main ideas so far

Let's check to see if everyone agrees with what we've written down so far

Let's take turns to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

Why don't we try it this way as we don't have much time left?

Come on, let's keep moving!

Let's hear from someone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet?

Getting started—some teaching approaches

We remember
10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what is discussed with others
80% of what we experience personally
95% of what we teach to someone else
(William Glasser)

Turn to your neighbour (Three to five minutes)

Ask the students to turn to a neighbour and explain the concept you've just taught or to explain how to do what you've just demonstrated or to summarise the 3 most important points of the discussion so far or whatever fits.

Think, Pair, Share

1. The teacher poses a questions and allows thinking time.
2. Students formulate an individual answer.
3. Share the answer with a partner.
4. Listen carefully to the answer.
5. Create a new answer that is better than the initial attempts through synthesizing and building on each others ideas.

The Snowball

1. The student writes down as many examples as they can come up with that illustrate for example, Lady Macbeth's capacity for evil/or list as many functions of the heart as you can think of/or different biblical images for God/ etc.
2. As a pair, compare your lists. You have 2 minutes.
3. As a foursome, select from your list the three most important examples.

Summarising pairs

1. Students take turns reading and orally summarising paragraphs. To begin with, both skim read the entire text to get the gist of it.
2. Then both read the first paragraph.
3. One person summarizes it (without looking at the text) while the other checks the paragraph for accuracy and offers prompts to help if anything is left out.
4. They then read the next paragraph and change roles until they have completed the text.

Cooperative threesomes

This can be used to answer a set of questions or solve a set of problems.

Each student is assigned a role, for example, you could have a Reader (reads the problem aloud to the group), Recorder (summarises and records the agreed answers), Checker (checks to make sure that all group members understand the text and questions, and agree on the answers).

The group must agree the answers and produce one set of answers. When the group is finished they can compare their answers with those of another group and discuss.

Writing an essay

1. Teacher assigns students to pairs. The essay title is given. Students describe to each other what they plan to write. They probe and discuss each other's ideas.
2. The students go away and research their own essay, keeping an eye out for materials useful to their partner.
3. Next day, the two students work together to write the first paragraph of each essay to ensure that they both have a good start.
4. Then they go away and draft their essays. When completed, the students proofread each others essay, making corrections and suggestions for revision.
5. The students redraft their essays, making the revisions.
6. The two students then reread each other essays and sign their names on each essay.

Maths drill/review pairs

1. Assign students to pairs with a set of maths problems.
2. Person A reads the problem and explains step-by-step the steps and strategies required to solve it. Person B watches as A solves the problem and checks the accuracy of the solution and provides help if it is needed. Then the roles reverse.
3. When two problems are completed, the pair checks their answers with another pair. If they do not agree, they must solve the problem until there is consensus.

Note-taking pairs

1. After the teacher has taught a section of the course the students are paired up (or arranged in small groups) and asked to create a set of notes that captures the main points related to the topic. The teacher and students may agree the key headings first.
2. Then together, they must agree what needs to be included in their notes. This gives them an opportunity to explain, discuss and synthesize the topic and make judgements about what is important and what is not. The students can use a range of sources to help them – their copy book, textbooks, the internet. This also develops their information processing skills.
3. When all the pairs/groups have an agreed set of notes then the teacher can lead a review session using the whiteboard to check that all the key points have been captured by everyone.
4. This approach can also be used when encountering new material. Students are assigned pairs, A and B. Each is asked to take notes on the topic being taught during the lesson. Every 10 minutes or so, the teacher stops the lesson and gets students to share their notes. Each person must take something from their partner's notes to improve their own notes.

Bookends

1. Set a question or set of questions at the start of class (before teaching a topic). This alerts the students to what they should be looking out for during class.
2. Teach the topic.
3. Then return to the question. At this point students work in pairs to review and organise what they have observed and learned and agree a set of answers. You can also combine pairs into groups of four and have the pairs share answers.

Jigsaw

At its simplest this means the teacher jigsaws materials so that the student cannot do the work without the other students' information. To complete the task the students must collaborate and interact. For example, different pieces of information on a topic might be given to different members of the group. Each person has to use the information they have to complete a shared task.

Jigsaw groups can also be used to enable peer teaching. In this scenario, students would be arranged into groups and each group given a different subtopic related to the one topic. They must become 'expert' on their subtopic and agree how they are going to teach it to their classmates. When they are ready, the groups are mixed up so that there is now one expert on each sub topic in each group. They now take turns 'teaching' their subtopic to each person in the group.

For a sample class activity using a Jigsaw approach check out

<http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills/ws/sample-learning-activities/>

Hot-seating

You may be familiar with the strategy of putting a learner in a HOT seat....taking the role of a character from fiction or from history, or of a person from another part of the world or facing a particular challenge. The class must think of questions to ask the character relating to the events in the story and the occupant of the HOT seat answers the questions from the character's perspective. For younger learners, it is best if the teacher models being the person in the HOT seat until the class become familiar with the concept.

There are a few variations on this which can really test HOT skills. Preparing questions in advance, organising radio interviews or panel discussions with the 'guests' in the HOT seat or seats, putting the whole class in the HOT seat and asking them to write their *Facebook* profile in character ...all of these work to get the learners thinking.

Freeze-frame

Students select a key moment, theme or idea and create a group sculpture to represent it. See <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills/videos>.

Forum theatre

One group acts out a scene or situation in front of the others who surround them in a circle. Those watching in the circle are able to stop the action and ask questions of the characters or make suggestions.

HOMEWORK CHECKING AND TESTING IDEAS

Homework Checkers

1. In pairs (or small groups), students compare homework answers, discuss anything they have not answered similarly or left out, and then correct their work.
2. The students attach the work together so that the teacher can grade one piece of homework from each pair/group and each member of the group get that grade.

Essay Checkers

1. Students read and mark what they like with a star and a question mark anywhere there is something they don't understand or think is weak.
2. They mark problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling or format
3. They discuss the paper as a whole with the writer.
4. They proofread the final draft.

Preparing for a test

Peer teaching: A list of topics is agreed. Then different topics are assigned to different members of the group for revision. Each student revises one topic and prepares to 'teach' it to their group in summary form, paying attention to the key words, ideas, definitions. They can use a poster, handout or graphic organiser to present their topic.

Or

Test questions are given to each group and their task is to help each other prepare to answer them in a test. The group take turns in the role of Explainer (explaining how to answer a question) and Accuracy Checker (verifying that the Explainer is correct and providing help as needed). The roles are rotated around the group until everyone understands the material on which they will be tested.

Testing a topic

It has been shown that working together can improve students' performance. This can work in a number of ways.

1. Students are given exam questions. Each completes the questions. Then students swap (in pairs) and evaluate each other's answer. Then both compare their answers and improve on how they answered the questions, as needed.
2. Students revise agreed topics and then they devise the questions and marking scheme for a class test. They then complete the test and mark each other's work using the agreed marking scheme.

Reviewing my Working Together skills - Student Checklist

	Always	Sometimes	Never
I shared my ideas and information			
I listened carefully to other peoples ideas			
I summarised all our ideas and information			
I asked for help when I needed it			
I helped the other members of my group learn			
I made sure everyone in my group understood			
I helped keep the group on task			
I encouraged and showed support to others			
<p>Three things I learned about working in groups today</p>			
<p>Next time I work in a group I will ...</p>			

Adapted from *Cooperation in the Classroom*, Johnson, Johnson and Holobec, 6:17, revised 1991)

References and websites

A range of additional ideas on teaching key skills can be found on the NCCA website at <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills>. There you will find videos, slide presentations, sample learning activities, and much more on all five key skills.

Articles in Info@ncca are available to download at www.ncca.ie.

Geoff Petty website www.geoffpetty.com (See 20 ways to teach without talking)

www.co-operation.org (Johnson and Johnson website)

<http://www.iasce.net> ([International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education](http://www.iasce.net)) Click on 'Resources' to link to interesting online papers and links to other sites

Cooperation in the Classroom, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, Interaction Book Company, Minnesota, revised 1991

The Teacher's Toolkit, Paul Ginnis, Crown House Publishing Ltd. 2002

Teachers' Pocketbooks (a series of booklets to help teachers make teaching and learning more dynamic, challenging and effective.) www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk

Teacher Reflection sheet

Select one approach, try it out and then answer the questions below.

Class:

Topic:

Date:

Teaching approach tried:

1. Give a brief description of the task you set for the students
2. What was the impact on the students? How did they respond?
3. What key skills were evident?

4. How might you improve this approach or do it differently again?

Student's reflection sheet

Class

Topic

Date

Give a brief description of how you participated in class today

The main thing I learned is...

I liked/didn't like this way of learning because.....

