

# 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.