

## Tips for Incorporating Collaborative Learning

- Show students what good conversations look by facilitating whole class discussions and pointing out when the discussion is going especially well—and why. Emphasize how to rephrase a student’s comment for clarity, challenge a student’s thinking with respect, or press for additional information if a comment is sketchy, and encourage everyone to participate. Once students understand what productive talk looks like, you can expect them to begin using it in peer discussions.
- Relevance and autonomy sustain all learning and it’s important to make sure that speaking and listening tasks are sufficiently challenging to prompt higher-order skills. Groups formed for the purpose of answering questions on a worksheet, for example, encourage off-task behavior and an attitude of “let’s get finished with this” instead of deepening learning through intrinsic motivation.
- Make sure that you actively work the room, going from group to group as a supporter instead of as a “group” police. This is the best time to model the fine art of talk by joining in the conversation if appropriate, affirming students’ contributions through positive comments or by gently moving the conversation back on target. The goal is for students to be so immersed in their discussion that they hardly notice you’re there, not suddenly “getting on task” when they see the teacher approaching.
- Many students get distracted by the noise in the room during group work. Keeping groups at 3 to 4 helps with the noise and minimizes distractions. The teacher who offered this suggestion said she had one group that worked very productively under a table, for example.
- If you have difficulty with classroom management of small groups, observe another teacher who has a system in place for small group work. There are many different ways of grouping students as well as instructional routines for managing groups. Try different methods and don’t become discouraged if it takes a while to make this shift.
- Have something for students to do after the group completes its work for the day such as reading, working on an ongoing project, completing items in their portfolio, and so forth.

--From *This Is Disciplinary Literacy...* by ReLeah Lent