What is collaborative learning?

By Aaron Wilkes

Put simply, ‘collaborative learning’ is a situation where learners work in groups of two or more to learn – or attempt to learn – something together. They might search for meanings or solutions, or for understanding (of an historical source or political cartoon, for example). Or they may create something, like a product, poster, diagram or presentation. The emphasis is very much on the team, where they work as a group, rather than in a group. The teacher’s role is to set up a learning environment where students can ask one another for information, feel safe, secure and encouraged enough to share, evaluate each other’s ideas and contributions and monitor their work together. At its best, collaborative learners are collectively responsible for something - but individually accountable.

Below are some examples of a variety of these activities I’ve used in both History and Geography lessons.

Scrabble Challenge - starter

Group works together to recall the highest scoring word linked to a previous lesson. They can use letters more than once.

Picture Alphabet

Group comes up with as many words as possible beginning with the highlighted letters surrounding the image.
**Tarsia**


Group creates their own tarsia, then swaps it with another group to "race" each other to completion.

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**Information Station**

Individuals within the group go to separate stations of information which are dotted around the room. They collect information, facts and figures from their individual information station, then return to the group area and contribute in answering a collective worksheet.

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**Memory Game**

One person in the group acts as a ‘scribe’. A student from the group then leaves the room for 30 seconds to look at a picture, painting or a diagram that is outside the room. Upon their return they describe the image to the scribe. Whilst they are describing the image, another group member leaves the room to look at the same image. They then return to describe what they have seen to the scribe. Eventually, you will get a situation where the whole team are describing what they have seen, whilst the scribe is busily trying to pull together the ‘collective vision’.
Fox’s Doughnuts

1. Individual students in a group (e.g. x 4) read their own article, feature or part of the whole.

2. Each student given two pieces of doughnut. They sum up their article on one piece.

3. On another piece of doughnut they write about another aspect of the article – e.g. pros & cons or long and short term.

4. Students combine pieces together to form a doughnut. A list is compiled of “facts” that they then agree on from their completed doughnut.

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