

## Collaborative Learning Groups

Within AVID, we refer to our groups as collaborative rather than cooperative because they do not necessarily follow all the organizational rules, which gurus of cooperative teaming espouse. In AVID, the purpose of collaborative learning is to bring students together to take responsibility for their own learning. In small groups, they ask, explore, and answer questions; they become better listeners, thinkers, speakers, and writers; they discover ideas and remember them because they are actively involved with them. The teacher/tutor becomes a coach, carefully guiding students in their learning. Research shows that students learn best when they are actively manipulating those materials through making inferences and then generalizing those inferences. Collaborative groups encourage this kind of thinking.

### Collaborative Learning Groups vs. Traditional Learning Groups

<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Collaborative</u>
No interdependence	Positive interdependence
No individual accountability	Individual accountability
Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
One appointed leader	Shared leadership
Responsibility only for self	Shared responsibility for one another
Social skills not a focus	Social skills necessary for task completion
No group processing	Groups process their effectiveness
Teacher/tutor does not focus on	Teacher/tutor observes and intervenes
group functioning	

## Preparing for Collaborative Learning Groups

### The Task

In collaborative learning groups, students experience the process of learning, the how, as well as the what, of learning. In order to achieve this, the teacher/tutor must carefully guide the group to encourage members to share their ideas and to explore and respect the ideas of others. The group must constantly probe, define, and redefine until the expression of ideas is precise and clear. The group task may have students share individual completed assignments, notes, or work together to brainstorm or to problem solve.

## Selection of Groups

In collaborative learning, there is no set way to group students. Depending on the class and the assignment, the teacher may use teacher-determined, self-selected, spatial, or randomly selected groups.

## (AVID Methodologies in a Nutshell Continued)

### Preparing Students

Students need to be prepared to work in groups; though, in the beginning they may shy away from group work because they are reluctant to share their work. Group work should begin with experiences that are non-threatening and gradually increase in task demands and duration. Teachers need to discuss "group etiquette," stereotyping, and group dynamics with the students before they begin work, as well as tell them that the benefits to working in collaborative groups are:

1. No one knows everything.
2. Teachers expect analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of subject matter, which is *the stuff* of collaborative groups.
3. Students will move faster and remember more.
4. Being with other people is more fun than learning alone!

Since learning to collaborate in groups is an ongoing process, after completing a group activity, the students should write about and discuss what went well in their groups and what they need to improve for the next time.

### Avoiding Mayhem

1. Provide the students with careful instructions and simple directions before they move into groups.
2. Establish a specific routine for moving into groups.
3. Have students move their desks close together to prevent loud talking and to create a group atmosphere conducive to exchanging ideas.
4. Establish a reasonable time limit. Allowing too much time for an activity can cause the groups to deteriorate. It is better for the groups to have too little time than too much.

Remember, it takes time and practice for students to learn to work effectively in collaborative learning groups.