

ALERT



ADOLESCENT LITERACY: ENGAGING RESEARCH AND TEACHING

Make room for SUPPORTING STUDENT COLLABORATION

DID YOU KNOW?

The *co-* in collaborate means *together* (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). However, collaboration is not the same as group work; simply bringing students together is only one small part of what it means to collaborate. Collaboration occurs when group members bring their own perspectives and ideas and wrestle with their thinking collectively so that new ideas emerge. Collaboration allows each student to express, challenge, and build on the ideas of others as well as their own (Frey, Fisher & Everlove, 2009).

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* has identified collaboration as one of several learning and innovation skills necessary for post-secondary education and workforce success. Fullan, in *Great to Excellent*, identifies collaboration as one of six key qualities students need to go forward as learners, innovators, and as citizens (The six qualities Fullan identifies are character, citizenship, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, and creativity and imagination). As he defines it, collaboration involves learners working in teams, learning from and contributing to the learning of others, networking, and developing empathy by working with others who bring diverse backgrounds and experiences (Fullan, 2013).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ADOLESCENT LEARNERS?

From online gaming to the creation of viral videos to teams tackling complex, global problems, adolescents live in a world where they see, and often participate in, collaborative efforts leading to collective goals.

Engaging adolescents in collaboration helps them recognize that complex tasks require the diverse strengths of a number of people rather than the talents of one. Working collaboratively also helps learners develop a range of literacy skills that they may not be able to develop and strengthen by working independently. These skills include listening purposefully to others' ideas, metacognitively thinking about how their understanding is shaped by others, and synthesizing ideas from a number of peers' perspectives.

Literacy**GAINS**

“Students will need to be able to collaborate. Our students are already living in a world where successful collaboration is an increasingly critical skill to master.”

Johnson, 2011



Supporting student collaboration capitalizes on the high value adolescents place on their social interactions with their peers. At this time in their development, adolescents' social worlds tend to expand, they identify themselves with various social groups (that differ from those they had as children), and their memberships within peer groups become increasingly important (Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2012). Combining learning opportunities with their desire to be with peers is often motivating, partly due to students being accountable to each other rather than just to the teacher.

Effective collaboration also has the potential to help learners to recognize the strengths they bring to a task, as well as to appreciate the contributions of their peers. This helps them develop more accurate perceptions of the reliability of their social network to guide them through a variety of situations as they become more independent (Steinberg, 2008).

Collaborative Learning

- Students direct their learning through thinking and discussion
- Centres on open-ended tasks with more complex responses or varied goals
- Requires individual students to be responsible for final product
- Promotes the creation of new knowledge
- Students commit to the collective learning of the group

IN THE CLASSROOM

GETTING STARTED

- Create a safe, inclusive environment that promotes risk-taking and work with students to develop norms of collaboration and discussion etiquette (See Discussion Etiquette, [Think Literacy Cross-curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12](#)).
- Use short, partner-driven conversations (e.g., Think-Pair-Share, Save the Last Word) including in students' first language, and provide feedback to promote interpersonal skills needed for more complex tasks (Fisher, Frey & Everlove, 2009).
- Help learners distinguish between types of conversation (e.g., storytelling, agenda setting, problem solving, brainstorming, decision making) (Probst, 2007), and guide them to monitor what types of talk they are using, and which ones are supporting their collaborative efforts.
- Explicitly teach and model collaboration skills (e.g., using role play, discussion, fishbowl, coaching).
- Set up flexible, short-term groupings to allow students to work with a variety of peers with a variety of strengths, interests and perspectives, and that provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their strengths.
- Develop learning tasks that focus on big ideas and essential questions where students have reasons to collaborate, and where there are a number of skill sets that lead to successful achievement of the learning goal(s).
- Conduct group- and self-assessments that focus on the learning process and skills of collaboration.

TRY IT OUT: SHAPING IDEAS COLLABORATIVELY

As students are reading or viewing a text, ask them to individually take summary notes (e.g., jotting points on sticky notes). Once they have their notes, form groups of three or four students. Invite each member of the group to share their summary notes, then ask students to form a gist statement which incorporates the ideas from the entire group.

Follow this by asking students to reflect on what they knew about the topic before and after they collaborated. Invite students to discuss how collaboration helped them shape or deepen their initial ideas on the topic.

When students collaborate, they are "engaged in the kind of teamwork that is so highly prized in business and industry, although sometimes suspect in school settings where solitary work is still too often prized."

Fisher and Frey, 2008

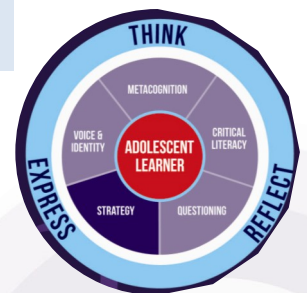
SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE TALK

In order for students to engage in effective collaboration, they need to use purposeful talk, or what Zwiars and Crawford (2011) call academic conversations. Academic conversations require students to use five conversation skills which are necessary for seeking understanding, supporting thinking, and expanding ideas. The chart below lists the conversation skill, sample prompts to help students use the language of the skill, and sample evidence that supports the assessment and feedback of the skill.

Conversation Skill	Sample Prompts	Look and listen for students to
Elaborate and Clarify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you mean by...? • Can you tell me more about...? • How does that connect to...? • I am a little confused about... Can you explain more about...? • In other words... • It is important because... • I think it means that... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask for and offer additional information related to the topic • provide specific details in response (rather than repeating what is already said) • put ideas into their own words, finding alternate ways of saying what they are reading, hearing, seeing
Support Ideas with Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me an example from the article (or other text)? • Can you show me where it says that? • What might be an example of what you are talking about? • What might that look like? • For example... • In the text it said that... • One case showed that... • An example from my life is... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide examples and details relevant to the topic or issue under discussion • directly refer to texts and other material to identify information, making clear to peers from where they are drawing information (e.g., pointing to the text, reading aloud excerpts to the group) • visualize and imagine possible scenarios as examples
Build on and/or Challenge Peers' Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about this idea? • Do you agree? • What might be some other points of view? • How can we bring this back to the question of...? • What other ideas could we include? • I would add that... • I want to expand on your point about... • The question I have about that is... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide input that is relevant and that builds on ideas • reach consensus that is genuine, and that students aren't just being agreeable to avoid challenging • critically question ideas as they are developed • promote equity of voices
Paraphrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we relate what I said to our topic/question? • What do we know so far? • In other words, are you saying that...? • Let me see if I understand you... • In other words... • It sounds like you are saying... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put ideas into their own words and elaborate with details to explain complex concepts and ideas when necessary • review work periodically • invite each other to repeat ideas back to check for clarity, understanding, and/or agreement within the group
Synthesize Conversation Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have we discussed (or determined) so far? • How can we bring this all together? • What have we agreed upon? • What was our original question? What main points can we share? • We can say that... • The main point here seems to be... • The evidence seems to suggest that... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • record key ideas (e.g., on sticky notes) and use notes to track their thinking • review points of discussion periodically • refer back to a question and/or learning goal as they build ideas (e.g., to monitor their discussion, remain on topic)

“When I observe students thinking together, they focus on coming to a shared understanding of a topic or final product through reasoning and constructively criticizing ideas. They strive for clarity and justification of ideas that push them to think about the quality and nature of abstract ideas. Ultimately, students construct new knowledge and new academic skills.”

Zwiars & Crawford, 2011



The Adolescent Literacy Guide outlines components which support students abilities to think, express and reflect. Strategy is one of the components to which this ALERT connects.

Adapted from Zwiars, J. & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk that Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

To support students to develop the skills for academic conversations:

- Develop a reference tool (e.g., anchor chart, bookmark) listing the skills and sample prompts (See columns 1 and 2 in the chart) and encourage students to actively use the tool during their collaboration.
- View examples of effective discussions (e.g., [Student-Facilitated Literature Circles](#)) with students and prompt them to identify effective conversation skills.
- Develop a set of look-fors with students for their collaborative discussions (See column 3), and use these to assess and provide feedback (e.g., as part of Learning Skills and Work Habits).
- Scaffold by having students practice one or a few of the skills at a time, and make connections to the purpose of those skills to their work.

RECOGNIZING COLLABORATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

Students' understanding of the skills of collaboration can be supported by having them note and recognize the contributions of their peers when working collaboratively. One way to do this is by asking them to respond as part of an exit card.

In recognizing their peers' contributions, students can note:

- The name of the peer they wish to acknowledge,
- The collaboration skill they note,
- How their peers' contributions have enhanced the collaborative work, and/or
- How their peers have helped shape new thinking.

This information can be used to publically acknowledge the collaborative contributions, and/or to confirm or inquire about other observations made during collaborative work.

IN BRIEF

Providing opportunities for students to work together, and then supporting their collaboration skills in a variety of ways, helps them develop deeper understanding of content. In addition, collaboration fosters skills to bring a variety of ideas and perspectives into students' work.

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FOR MORE ON...

Adolescent Literacy

Literacy GAINS (2012). [Adolescent Literacy Guide: A Professional Learning Resource for Literacy, Grades 7-12](#)

Supporting Student Questioning

Literacy GAINS (Spring 2013). [ALERT: Make Room for Students to Pose and Pursue Questions](#)

Promoting Purposeful Talk

Literacy GAINS (Fall 2012). [ALERT: Make Room for Talking to Learn](#)