

Group Work

Education

The conditions under which collaboration helps, and the default under which it does not.

Cooperative learning works with structure. Unstructured group work usually does not.

Needed for it to work

A task that genuinely needs more than one person

Individual accountability for a visible part

Group members who have the prior knowledge

Explicit teaching of how to work together

Clear roles agreed before the task starts

Common failure modes

One pupil does the work, five watch

Discussion of the task rather than the content

The strongest pupil dictates the answer

Social loafing when only the group is assessed

Groups too large for everyone to contribute

Cooperative learning with individual accountability has reasonable evidence behind it. Group work without it has very little.