

# Inclusive teamwork

**Jo Steer** offers strategic advice and suggests activities that will help to develop good teamworking skills and ensure that no one is ever left out

**Done well, team-based activities can be incredibly rewarding, allowing for the development of independent and collaborative learning skills and often resulting in spectacular end products and presentations.**

Done poorly, however, they can quickly descend into chaos. Follow these dos and don'ts to ensure that your teams are pulling together, not falling apart.

## Do...

### ...give everyone a job

Whether they are writer, reader, thinker or observer – or creator, manager, advertiser and presenter for an enterprise project – having a team role gives students a purpose and helps them stay on task.

They might keep the same roles over several lessons or change them periodically, depending on the class dynamic, individual needs and the task in question. If you explain clearly what each job entails, and why it is important, this will lead to a much smoother lesson than the vague instruction to 'work in teams.'

### ...be flexible

For students with SEND, particularly where these relate to social interaction difficulties, teamwork is a big ask. With a little flexibility, it is possible to involve everyone, each in their own way.

If someone struggles to work in a group, let them work with a partner instead. Provide sentence openers to promote the language of effective teamwork. Differentiate team outcomes.

Where a child finds even partner work too much to handle, appoint them as teamwork observer, recording groups' team skills against set criteria before feeding back at the end of the lesson. This one has never failed me!

### ...discuss and model teamwork

This might involve watching a video of emperor penguins using teamwork to stay alive in freezing conditions; it could be a simple discussion of what

good and poor teamwork looks like; it might be a little partner work, or a quick team game to practise the skills. Discussion and modelling get teams off to a good start.

### ...use team points to encourage good teamwork and behaviour

Two of the biggest barriers to success are arguments and off-task behaviour. If certain individuals are pushing boundaries, I find that a tally of team points on the board works wonders.

I ask each group to come up with a team name and give them 10 points to start off with. As the lesson progresses, I add or deduct points, sometimes explaining why and sometimes just using a 'look.' The competitive element propels students to show those great teamwork qualities we modelled and stick to their roles. A prize for the winners always helps – whether it's a little bag of sweets each, house points or a positive call home.

## Don't...

### ...expect instant results

As teamwork begins to improve, you may push students to work with people they would normally avoid or take on roles outside their comfort zone.

Inevitably, this will lead to problems and upsets. Remember that teaching children to collaborate takes time and no matter how well you prepare the ground, there are bound to be setbacks. Just keep a smile on your face and try again. Even better, use this as a learning opportunity and ask the class what they could have done differently to make the experience more productive and enjoyable.

### ...be a control freak

As teamwork continues to improve, you can begin to feel redundant in your role as teacher. There is a tendency to fight against this, interrupting with unnecessary frequency. *Don't*. Constantly stopping students in the flow of work will simply frustrate them. Being demoted to the role of supervisor means you are achieving your goal of developing efficient, trustworthy, self-reliant team players.

### ...forget to measure progress

Measuring students' progress in teamwork will help them to appreciate its value, particularly in secondary education.

Teamworking skills can be broken down and measured formally through traffic light systems like Duddle ([www.duddlelearn.co.uk](http://www.duddlelearn.co.uk)), enabling students, parents and staff to see what problems students are encountering socially and what their next steps should be.

Alternatively, try using teamwork tracking logs, where students complete reflections and next-step targets after every team project. Reviewing these before a new project reminds them of what they need to do and the areas that still require some work.

### ...neglect mini-plenaries and plenaries

It is really important to include regular opportunities for reflection. It can be as simple as asking students to score themselves for their teamworking skills so far, which may be enough to help them self-regulate, or let you know that you need to intervene.

In plenaries, you might ask for a short written reflection against set criteria, hold a verbal discussion of what went well and what didn't, or receive feedback from team or class observers.

## Teamwork tips

- Take pictures of students when they are demonstrating teamwork body language. Use these as part of a display or review them on the whiteboard to remind the class of what good teamwork physically looks like.
- Keep interrupters in check by giving each team an object and telling them that only the person holding this is entitled to speak. Add or deduct team points based on how well they manage this.
- Take advantage of school trips to practise teamwork. The prospect of climbing up a wall when your knees are knocking, or being thrown into freezing water if your team canoe capsizes, will pull any team closer together.

## Opportunities for teamwork within *any* lesson

**Where classes struggle to work in teams, either as a result of personality clashes, off-task behaviour or lack of independence, find opportunities to build regular partner and team tasks into daily routine.**

By tweaking and structuring the partner and teamwork that's most likely to be part of your practice, you can train students to fine-tune their collaborative and social skills.

### **Partner talk**

- The class is given a question – for example: 'What does good teamwork look like?'
- In pairs or threes, they speak in turn, practising active listening along the way.
- To push deeper thinking skills, you might set a strict time limit for each contribution – say, 30 seconds – and give them a timer to keep up the pressure. Bear in mind, however, that some pupils may freeze or run out of things to say, so use this strategy with sensitivity.
- Where you allow for more flexible timings, encourage partners to support nervous speakers with prompts and questions.

**Note:** Partner work is particularly helpful for children who are anxious about speaking out in class, as they are preparing their answer in advance.

### **Snowballing**

- The class is given a question.
- Working in teams, the first person speaks and records what they have said on a piece of paper or a mini-whiteboard, perhaps in the form of a spider diagram, while others listen.
- They pass what they have written to the next person, who reads it out and adds another suggestion.
- If someone can't think of anything to say, classmates can interject with questions.

### **Turn-taking tasks**

- Working in pairs, students are given a task – for example, reviewing sources in history and completing a table about what they found and how reliable this is.
- In this scenario, both partners



Partner talk prepares students for more demanding team-based activities

review the source, then one of them records the answer, with the other one guiding them as to what they should write.

- With each new source or question, they swap roles.

**Note:** You can sell this to students as being half the work, but actually they are deepening their skills and understanding through partner discussion.

### **Peer marking**

- Working in pairs, students review each other's work – for example, a piece of creative writing.
- They place one student's work between them and the author reads it out (this avoids problems in deciphering others' writing).
- The peer assessor goes through the piece, highlighting qualities, raising questions and suggesting improvements. This is most effective when there are set criteria to mark against.
- The assessor might add a comment and set a target – modelling this and/or providing examples may be necessary first – before they swap and repeat the process.

**Note:** In many schools, peer assessment happens at least once a day, but often more. It is therefore a brilliant opportunity to build up teamwork and turn-taking skills, reinforcing the ethos of constructive criticism, learning from our mistakes and classmate support.

### **Ask the experts**

- As a change from introducing a new concept or consolidating it yourself, choose a group of students to be your class experts.
- If this is the second lesson on, say, multiplying fractions, experts might be children who excelled in the first one. If it's a new topic, you might choose a group of children to go out for a period of time to read up on key information ahead of everyone else.
- The idea is that every table has an expert who will instruct the team in all they need to know to complete the tasks as well as answering their questions throughout the lesson.

**Note:** As well as being incredibly helpful to you and their peers, our experts will consolidate their own skills and understanding by breaking things down and explaining them to others.

## Teamwork games

**Games are a fun and engaging way to build up students' collaborative muscles and set your teams up for success.**

### *The tallest tower*

**Resources:** newspaper, cellotape, scissors.

As preparation for a teamwork project, ask students to build the tallest tower in teams. I usually give them 10 minutes for this, with a visible timer on the board. To be in the running to win, the tower must be upright and freestanding (not sneakily taped to the table).

If time allows, I split the class in half and have one team observing another while they work and then repeat. This leads to a good discussion about how the most successful teams interacted with each other, and why in some cases, things didn't go so well. It's fascinating watching them interact and will tell you a lot about the team dynamic before they embark on the project. Plus, it's great, messy fun!

**Tip:** If you don't mind a little more mess, swap newspaper and scissors for spaghetti and marshmallow. Due to the nature of the materials, students are pushed to think more deeply about how they construct their tower.

### *Teamwork hats*

**Resources:** newspaper, cellotape, scissors.

Using only the resources on their table, students have to create a teamwork hat which is wearable and has key words or phrases relating to teamwork visibly written on it (not hidden in the folds).

Again, I usually allow 10 minutes for this, with maybe a class vote at the end for the winner. Not only are students having to work together to create the hat, they are also discussing what good teamwork is while doing it. Win-win!

### *Silent copying*

**Resources:** paper, scissors (optional). This is an idea two boys in Year 7 came up with when I tasked the class with creating teamwork activities that we might all try.

Working in pairs, one student creates a picture or origami-style animal in silence while their partner watches. The partner then recreates the same thing from memory while the first student watches. As well as giving you 10 blissful minutes of peace, this is a super-engaging activity that forces students to really focus.

### *Picture memory game*

**Resources:** PowerPoint slide with a selection of pictures.

This is a great lesson starter and extremely easy to put together.

Show the class a screen containing 10 or more pictures, give them a minute

to look in silence, and then ask them to write down what they saw in pairs or teams of up to four. The pictures can be linked to the theme of the lesson and you can differentiate by changing the viewing time or the number of pictures. Children immediately see the value of working with others simply because they all remember different things.

### *Active memory game*

**Resources:** Handout or worksheet cut into parts.

Embed teamwork skills into your subject lesson through this active memory game.

Say you have a written handout containing 10 pieces of information you need the class to learn. Print one out, cut out the 10 statements or paragraphs, and place these around the room. Get each team to nominate a runner who will go and find one of the slips, read it twice and return to the team, relaying the contents as accurately as they can to an appointed writer. In essence, they are just reading from a worksheet and writing it down, but it certainly doesn't feel that way. Children love it.

At the end, they might peer mark other teams' answers, based on explicit criteria – for example: 'If this section includes the words x, y or z, award one point.' A little competition can turn a potentially dull topic into an enthralling game.

## Standalone teamwork lessons

**If students haven't worked together before or you can see potential problems ahead, it can be extremely effective to take an hour or two out of the curriculum to focus explicitly on teamwork skills.**

This might seem a luxury you can ill afford, but it will save time and frustration in future lessons, as you won't be constantly 'mopping up' problems, arguments and poor behaviour.

### *Marble run*

**Resources:** a tray, cellotape, three sheets of card, a marble, a stopwatch, scissors.

Working in teams of up to four, task the students with creating an effective

marble run using the resources above.

As with the tallest tower, the structure must be freestanding, and the winner will be the team whose marble 'runs' for the longest time. I usually allow 15 minutes for planning and 50 minutes to create.

Yes, it's another messy lesson, but children love it and, again, it will allow you (possibly with the aid of teamwork observers) to really see their collaborative strengths and weaknesses.

Don't forget to discuss great examples of teamwork in the plenary and encourage them to reflect on what went well and what they could improve next time.

### *Fashion show*

**Resources:** newspaper, scissors,

cellotape.

This is one of my favourites and has always been a massive hit with Key Stage 3 girls and boys alike. It is basically an extension of the teamwork hat starter idea, developed into a full lesson.

Students are asked to design a hat with specific criteria (freestanding, wearable and doesn't fall off when modelled) and allocated the roles of manager, model, designer, catwalk presenter and assistants. They have 15 minutes' planning and design time, followed by 40 minutes' creating time, before models present their hats to the class while the catwalk presenter describes their product. Winners are chosen through a class vote, or by judges

**PLUS. MINUS. INTERESTING.**  
*What if money grew on trees?*

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
Poor people would be able to find money.	There might be fights near trees (e.g. worse than Black Friday!)	Would money lose value if there was more of it? (inflation)

**P.M.I.**

**In two weeks' time, the government will ban all people under 18 from using a PlayStation or Xbox.**

**Think:** Why might the government have done this?  
Are some young people overusing these devices / playing on inappropriate games / losing sleep? How might the ban help health?  
On the other hand, what problems might this cause?  
What about people who don't overuse it?  
Are there any educational or social benefits to using these consoles?

who award points against the criteria. I loved this lesson so much, I extended it over four hours to include research into hats, asking students to design a hat based on a particular theme, e.g. sweet treats, and asking them to bring in items from home (you wouldn't believe how excited they were about sweet wrappers and milk cartons!), then prepping the catwalk models with some videos from YouTube on *How to walk like a model*.

**P.M.I. presentations**

**Resources:** PowerPoint slide including a P.M.I. question for each group, large paper, pens/coloured pens, ipad or computer with internet access for one person per group.

P.M.I. stands for Plus, Minus and Interesting: students are given a statement and have to discuss what the positive and negative consequences of this would be and draw out the interesting points.

I go through an example statement with the class to model this, giving them five minutes to respond in their teams, then ask each team to appoint a manager, researcher, lead presenter and ideas person.

I usually give them at least an hour to put together a powerful presentation with the option of including raps or songs, role play, charts and expert interviews. At the end of the lesson, each group awards a score out of five against the criteria of describing the plus, minus, and interesting, along with the effectiveness of their teamwork and whether they showed us the 'wow' factor.

This will engage pupils of any age. Along with pushing those team skills, it encourages curiosity and engagement in a whole range of topics, as well as building up research, debate and presentation skills.

**Board game creators**

**Resources:** Large sheets of paper and card, string, glue, scissors, counters, dice.

I've taught this lesson myself and seen it taught in different contexts to children of varying ages. It never fails. Tasking your students to create board games, just for the sake of it or to consolidate knowledge and understanding at the end of a unit of work, offers opportunities for creativity, engagement, fun and, of course, teamwork.

I like to make this a full-blown project, giving students at least half an hour to research board games (preferably using the internet) before discussing ideas with their team. Once they're sure what they're going to make, I ask them to choose their own

team roles and go round while they are working, writing down names and job titles to make this feel official.

They then have two lessons (maybe more) to create the game, and one lesson to play. In the final lesson, I often ask one person to stay at their team base, while the others move around playing other teams' games.

**Useless Dragons' Den**

**Resources:** Paper and any random objects.

I saw this done once as a lesson starter and enjoyed it so much I made it into a whole lesson.

Each team (three or four works best) is given an object which is seemingly useless – a single sock, perhaps, or a bent paperclip, or a broken pencil. They have 25 minutes to create and practise a persuasive pitch which they will present to *Classroom Dragons' Den*. They're given examples of persuasive writing and phrasing, so they're not going in blind, but they really have to use their team-thinking skills to sell the benefits of a product that is apparently useless.

I'm more and more impressed every time I do this, particularly by the way the challenge seems to really pull individuals together. Our class dragons always enjoy themselves too!

**Team Roles**

**Manager.** The manager's role is to make sure that everyone has a job to do and that the team is working together well. If the manager feels that something is wrong, they need to discuss this with the group.

**Observer.** The observer watches the team carefully as they work and records how well they are communicating with each other and pulling together. They must keep this to themselves for now, so no one is allowed to peak. They must also remember not to put anything that is too personal or negative, as it's not helpful.

**Reader.** The reader reads out any information that the group has been given and makes sure that everyone hears and understands.

**Writer.** The writer listens carefully to what the group is saying and records any information needed.

**Thinker.** The thinker looks at the task and helps the group decide how to answer any questions or complete any work that has been set. If there are more than five people in a group, there can be more than one thinker.

**\*\*All roles are very important for the team to work properly\*\***  
*Adapted from Kagan Cooperative Learning*



*Jo Steer has 10 years' experience in both primary and secondary education, including special needs.*

*Through her consultancy, Skills with Frills, she offers a flexible variety of services, including engaging workshops which combine wellbeing, mindfulness and cognitive behaviour therapy with important learning skills to set children on the path to success. Available to schools in Yorkshire and beyond. See [www.skillswithfrills.com](http://www.skillswithfrills.com) or email [skillswithfrills@gmail.com](mailto:skillswithfrills@gmail.com)*