**Cooperative Learning**

There is a lot of research demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the classroom. We also know that groupwork can sometimes be a recipe for disaster. Social researchers Johnson & Johnson studied groups and found that there were 5 key elements to effective groupwork.  Of course, in addition to these elements,  academic goals and success criteria must be clear.

**1. Positive Interdependence**

This means the group has a clear task or goal so everyone knows they sink or swim together. The efforts of each person benefit not only the individual, but also everyone else in the group. This means that the task and environment are designed to increase the chances that group members will support each other to complete the task through providing incentives, an outside force, a sequence or roles or a group identity.

Ways to facilitate Positive Interdependence:

* The group has only one pencil, paper, book, or other resource.
* One response is written by the group.
* A task is divided into jobs and can't be finished unless all help.
* Pass one paper around the group on which each member must write a section.
* Each person learns a topic and then teaches it to the group (Jigsaw method).
* Offer a reward (e.g. bonus points) if everyone in the group succeeds.

**2. Individual and Group Accountability**

The group is accountable for achieving its goals, and each member must be accountable for contributing a fair share of the work toward the group goal. No one can "hitchhike" on the work of others. This means that each individual is either responsible for a defined section of the work or has a specific role, or that each contribution is visible (like in a placemat).

**3. Interpersonal and Small Group Skills**

Interpersonal and small group skills are required to function as part of a group. These are basic teamwork skills. Group members must know how to - and be motivated to - provide effective leadership, make decisions, build trust, communicate, and manage conflict. This means we need to explicitly teach social skills. For a group task that lasts longer than a few minutes, we can do this by setting a social task or social focus as well as an academic goal.

**4. Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction**

Organising students to invoke face to face interaction increases individual accountability in that the students are visible through their proximity to each other. It means rearranging desks or chairs so that students are facing each other not sitting far apart or side-by-side in a line.

**5. Group Processing**

If we do not take time to process and ask students to reflect on their social skills and/or how they have functioned as a group, some students will not take social skills seriously. The process of reflection is an important part of development.

Adapted from *Cooperative Learning* by Bennet, Rolheiser & Stevahn