## Synthesis
# Collaborative learning [i]

Moderate impact for very low cost, based on extensive evidence

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A collaborative (or cooperative) learning approach involve pupils working together on activities or learning tasks in a group small enough for everyone to participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned. Pupils in the group may work on separate tasks contributing to a common overall outcome, or work together on a shared task.

Some collaborative learning approaches put mixed ability teams or groups to work in competition with each other in order to drive more effective collaboration. There is a very wide range of approaches to collaborative and cooperative learning involving different kinds of organisation and tasks. Peer tutoring can also be considered as a type of collaborative learning, but in the Toolkit it is reviewed it as a separate topic.

## How effective is it?

The impact of collaborative approaches on learning is consistently positive. However, the size of impact varies, so it is important to get the detail right. Effective collaborative learning requires much more than just sitting pupils together and asking them to work in a group; structured approaches with well-designed tasks lead to the greatest learning gains. There is some evidence that collaboration can be supported with competition between groups, but this is not always necessary, and can lead to learners focusing on the competition rather than the learning it aims to support. Approaches which promote talk and interaction between learners tend to result in the best gains.

## Latin American Evidence [ii]

Collaborative learning is a well-developed field of educational research in Latin America and the Caribbean. Studies conducted in the region tend to show positive effects on different dimensions of the teaching and learning process. There are relevant results in terms of students' personal

development, as they acquire greater confidence about their abilities, develop leadership skills, improve relationships among them, and learn self-regulation skills during the process. Besides, new work dynamics are introduced in the classroom.

This strand of research has shown how collaborative learning can be effective in combination with ICT platforms, and specific methodologies such as Project-based Learning and learning English as a second language.

A study that tested a methodology of working groups shows that social interaction, critical thinking, and communication can enhance not only the retention of specific concepts and nomenclature, but also general understanding of the subject. Another intervention that sought to develop competence in writing, using a collaborative task-based approach concludes that students who work cooperatively learn better than those who work individually and that collaborative learning could therefore improve the capacity to produce texts and summarise texts. These results show significantly better learning outcomes among students who work collaboratively.

Although most interventions in the region have been focused on students, they also consider those methods that are applied to teachers, which generate significant indirect impacts on students' learning.

It must be emphasized that the research carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean has used different methodologies. These research usually use qualitative methods, which are mainly focused on action research, and mixed methods with quasi-experimental designs.

It is important to note that, even though there is a diversity of research in this field, most of them tend to highlight the positive relationships that collaborative approaches have in relation to traditional methods.

## How secure is the evidence?

Over 40 years a number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses have provided consistent evidence about the benefits of collaborative learning. In addition to direct evidence from research into collaborative approaches, there is also indirect evidence that has shown that collaboration can increase the effectiveness of other approaches such as Mastery learning or Digital technology. Collaborative learning appears to work well for all ages if activities are suitably structured for learners' capabilities and positive evidence has been found across the curriculum. Not all of the specific approaches to collaborative learning adopted by schools have been evaluated, so it is important to evaluate any new initiative in this area.

# What are the costs?

Overall the costs are estimated as very low. Ongoing training for teachers is advisable.

# What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Pupils need support and practice to work together; it does not happen automatically. [SEP]
2. Tasks need to be designed carefully so that working together is effective and efficient, otherwise some pupils will try to work on their own. [SEP]
3. Competition between groups can be used to support pupils in working together more effectively. However, overemphasis on competition can cause learners to focus on winning rather than succeeding in their learning.
4. It is particularly important to encourage lower achieving pupils to talk and articulate their thinking in collaborative tasks to ensure they benefit fully.
5. Have you considered what professional development is required to support effective use of these approaches? [SEP]

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