

North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) Common Instructional Framework

Every student reads, writes, thinks and talks in every classroom every day

This common framework for instruction drives the instructional practice at NCNSP partner schools and has supported their success because it defines common practices that are used consistently from classroom to classroom. These strategies give all students of all skill levels access to the complex information needed to meet state and college-ready standard and engage all students, requiring each to take an active role in their own learning.

Collaborative Group Work: Collaborative group work involves bringing students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Collaborative group work uses questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk and centers literacy groups.

Writing to Learn: Writing to learn is a strategy through which students can develop their ideas, their critical thinking ability and their writing skills. Writing to learn enables students to experiment every day with written language and increase their fluency and mastery of written conventions. Writing to learn can also be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold mid- and high-stakes writing assignments and tests.

Literacy Groups: Literacy groups provide students with a collaborative structure for understanding a variety of texts and engaging in a higher level of discourse. Group roles traditionally drive literacy groups by giving each student a role to play and a defined purpose within the group. The specific roles or discussion guidelines may vary for different content areas, lengths of texts, or student level of sophistication using this strategy, but the purpose of literacy groups is to raise student engagement with texts by creating a structure within which they may do so.

Questioning: Questioning challenges students and teachers to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Effective questioning (by the teacher and by students) deepens classroom conversations and the level of discourse students apply to their work. Teachers use this strategy to create opportunities for students to investigate and analyze their thinking as well as the thinking of their peers and the authors that they read in each of their classes.

Scaffolding: Scaffolding helps students to connect prior knowledge and experience with new information. Teachers use this strategy to connect students with previous learning in a content area as well as with previous learning in an earlier grade. Scaffolding also helps facilitate thinking about a text by asking students to draw on their subjective experience and prior learning to make connections to new materials and ideas.

Classroom Talk: Classroom talk creates the space for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. Classroom talk takes place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, the teacher serves as a facilitator to engage students in higher levels of discourse. Classroom talk opens the space for questioning, effective scaffolding and successful collaborative group work and literacy groups.

** This Common Instructional Framework was first implemented school-wide at University Park Campus School in Worcester, MA.*

Collaborative Group Work

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Collaborative group work involves bringing students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Collaborative group work uses questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk and acts as the core of literacy groups.

Collaborative Group Work will

- allow students to practice using language specific to content areas.
- provide specific time to share and listen to new ideas.
- help students try out new language, process information, and get feedback.
- allow for both teacher-student and student-student interaction to occur.
- change the teacher role to one of an active facilitator.

Teachers will

- establish collaborative group work as a strategy for students to learn and work with others as they are acquiring new knowledge and skills that prepare them for college and the 21st century.
- scaffold students into collaborative group work by having them work in pairs and then small groups while increasing the complexity of the task.
- establish rules and expectations for groups, listen and observe as groups work, redirect students if necessary and push students to deepen their conversations.
- embed collaborative group work in lesson plans and vary group configurations, length of time in groups and group activities.
- make each group responsible for creating a product that reflects their learning.

Students will

- work together to develop problem solving, critical thinking and communications skills.
- be responsible for completing their share of work within the group.
- take risks, challenge themselves, and realize that making mistakes is part of the learning process.
- develop a commitment to their own learning and the learning of others.
- clarify their own thinking and understand content in a more rich, critical and connected way.

Collaborative Group Work...

- Allows students to practice using language specific to content areas
- Provides specific time to share and listen to new ideas
- Helps students try out new language, process information, and get feedback
- Allows for both teacher-student and student-student interaction to occur
- Changes the teacher role to one of an active facilitator
- Uses the teacher voice to scaffold, question, synthesize, and model

Getting Started...

- Give explicit instructions about group work requirements
- Set ground rules for how students will work in groups
- Use the “rule of feet” to facilitate group work
- Use data to plan both group configuration and learning objectives
- Debrief group work process and products
- Use protocols to set up group work roles and procedures

Ultimately, it...

- Should be a meaningful and purposeful part of lesson planning
- Can vary according to student needs
- Can be used across all content areas and grade levels
- Should be rigorous and relevant
- Must be more than the arrangement of furniture in a classroom
- Can be used to access both individual and group knowledge
- Gives students opportunities to find their voices and engage their peers