

Collaborative Reasoning

A structured approach to group thinking in which learners construct collective understanding through evidence-based argumentation

Anderson et al., 2001

WHAT IS IT?

Collaborative reasoning asks small groups to reason through open-ended questions together — using evidence, counterarguments, and logic.

Not All Group Work Is Collaborative Reasoning

✗ Typical Group Work

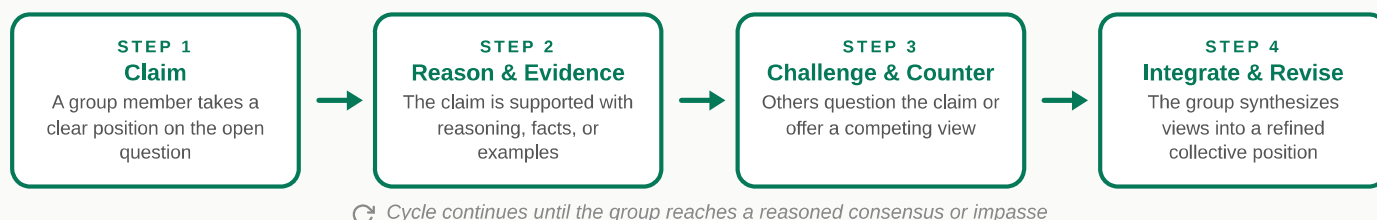
- ✗ Tasks are divided and completed solo
- ✗ One person's view often dominates
- ✗ Accountability is individual
- ✗ Reasoning is implicit or absent
- ✗ Product-focused

✓ Collaborative Reasoning

- ✓ Ideas are built jointly, not divided
- ✓ All voices contribute and are challenged
- ✓ The group owns the reasoning
- ✓ Evidence and argument are explicit
- ✓ Process-focused

The Collaborative Reasoning Cycle

Four moves that drive productive group argumentation



Conditions That Make It Work

● Genuinely open question

No single correct answer — multiple defensible positions must be possible

● Shared accountability

The group is responsible for the reasoning, not just an individual

● Norms for respectful challenge

Ideas are questioned, not people — disagreement is welcomed

● Teacher as facilitator

Teacher guides, prompts, and models reasoning — does not arbitrate

Key Teacher Moves

Pose the big question, then step back

Let the group drive — resist re-teaching or adjudicating who is right

Model the reasoning moves

Show what it sounds like to give a claim, provide evidence, and revise a view

Prompt for evidence, not just opinions

Ask "What makes you think that?" or "Can anyone challenge that with evidence?"

WHY IT MATTERS

Collaborative reasoning builds critical thinking, argumentation skill, reading comprehension, and the ability to take and defend a reasoned position — skills that transfer across subjects.