



DULWICH COLLEGE

# Using A Collaborative Charter To Improve The Efficacy Of Boys' Collaborative Skills

Matthew Poynter  
Dulwich College

## Further Information

This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>

Researcher's Email:  
poynterm@dulwich.org.uk

## Introduction

During the course of one term a class of Year 8 boys was chosen as the context for a collaborative learning exploration. Collaborative learning was an area of my personal teaching practice that I felt was being under utilised and could be developed into a much more effective and streamlined tool. The approach taken involved the drafting and creation of a "Collaborative Charter," which was designed and signed by the boys and contained the rules for collaboration. With the charter agreed on and in place, the students undertook three collaborative exercises. During these exercises, the boys were observed and asked to complete questionnaires on their collaborative experiences and particularly to comment on how the introduction of the charter had changed the way that they learnt. The results showed that the introduction of the collaborative charter made a positive impact on the efficacy of the boys' collaborative learning. In particular, it created a shift in the boys' understanding of the exercise from one focused upon the experience of the actual activity towards an outlook that looked forward to the learning outcomes.

## The Research Question

*How might the use of a Collaborative Charter for group learning projects improve the efficacy of Year 8 boys' collaborative skills?*

How has the imposition of the collaborative charter influenced the boys' collaborative skills?

Why has the imposition of the collaborative charter influenced the boys' collaborative skills?

## Research Context and Participants

Dulwich College is an all-boys academically selective independent school in south London, England. The students I chose as the participants in my action research project were a Year 8 class of 22 boys. Year 8 is a time when boys are developing the skills required for effective collaboration. The participants were a form class who both knew me and each other very well. Having taught the class for a full year already, I had a good relationship with the boys and a clear understanding of the skills and abilities of the individuals within the class.

## The Research Action

The first step was to work with the boys to create a "Collaborative Charter." This document was drafted and signed by the boys and contained the rules for collaboration.

The second stage was for the class to undertake three specific collaborative exercises over the course of half a term. During these the boys were observed and asked to complete questionnaires on their collaborative experiences and particularly to comment on how the introduction of the charter had changed the way that they learnt.

## Data Collection and Analysis

I used three distinct methods of data collection during the course of my research: The first method was a questionnaire, this was distributed both before and after the collaborative exercise and was a great source of data when it came to analysing the changes that had occurred during the collaborative exercise. The second method of data collection was through the medium of participant observation. This was undertaken during the collaborative exercise. This method allowed me to gain a close and familiar approach to the groups and their contributions. During the observation I was able to write field notes which allowed me to record my observations as the collaborative work progressed. The final stage of data collection began after the collaborative exercises had been completed. In this stage I used interviews and questionnaires to collect data and feedback on the collaborative exercise. These interviews were transcribed at the time and after each interview was completed, I was able to annotate the document with my thoughts and memories to assist me later when analysing the data.

## Key Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research can be split into two clear categories. The first deals with *How* the imposition of the collaborative charter influenced the boys' collaborative skills. The feedback for this question has been collated into the table below using the keywords that the students used to describe the activities before and after the imposition of the collaborative charter, with the most commonly used words highlighted in red:

Figure 3: The secondary key words categorised by theme

	Experience	Structure	Outcomes
Pre Charter	Chaotic	Unplanned	Unproductive
Post Charter	Enthusiastic	Organised	Productive

The imposition of the charter can be seen to have provided a broad shift in focus from an experienced based approach to the collaborative task towards an outlook which was more focused on learning outcomes and productivity. It became clear that the structure of the exercises was a key part in promoting this development. The second part of the analysis sought to get to grips with the *Why* part of the question and three themes became clear. These themes and some exemplar evidence are demonstrated in the diagram below:



## Conclusions

- The findings of my project exceeded my expectations and I have been able to distill the key drivers behind successful collaboration in my classroom and share these with my department and colleagues.
- I was able to conclude that the ingredients required for successful collaboration with the use of a collaborative charter require both a commitment to a clear value system and the implied organisation and delegation of tasks within the group. These were skills which the boys had to realise themselves as they were not implicitly stated in the charter and it is through this agency and self discovery that the real success of the exercise sits.



"The charter was something that we actively signed up to and we felt that we should actively respect it."

"Whenever we made a decision we thought whether or not we were sticking to the charter, this changed how we did things."

## Key Readings

Stringer, E. (2007). *Action research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.  
Webb, N. (2009). The teacher's role in promoting collaborative dialogue in the classroom. *British Journal Of Educational Psychology*, 79(1), 1-28.  
Gillies, R., Ashman, A., & Terwel, J. (2007). *The teacher's role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*. New York: Springer.



**International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2016 - 2017:  
Collaboration and the Power of Group Learning**