

Key Resource: Using group work in your classroom

What group work does

Group work can be a very effective way of motivating pupils to learn by encouraging them to think, communicate, exchange ideas and thoughts, and make decisions. In groups, pupils can both teach others and learn from each other in ways that result in a powerful and active form of learning.

When to do group work

Group work can be used:

- at the start of a lesson or topic, to find out what pupils already know;
- during a lesson, to encourage understanding or to share views and opinions about a topic;
- at the end of a lesson, to help pupils think about their learning and be clear about what they know and what they still need to understand.

Before you start

- Before starting a group session, be clear about what you want to achieve from it. It needs to have a clear purpose or objective. For example: 'By the end of the session we will be able to describe how rain is formed and what it does to our local landscape.'
- Divide the class into manageable groups depending on the size of your class, but don't make them too large – everyone needs to be able to contribute. You may have to move furniture or perhaps have some groups outside.
- Give each individual a job to do in the group. These could include: recorder of what's said; organiser; devil's advocate; peacekeeper; spokesperson; link person with other groups.
- Decide ways in which you will divide pupils into groups. You could use friendship groups, put similar personalities together, different personalities together, similar ability groups, mixed ability groups – or have no category at all. Which one will work best in the situation you are planning?
- Plan enough time for the pupils to reach a conclusion as well as time at the end of the session for each group – and you – to summarise the conclusions.

Introducing the group work

- Once pupils are in their groups, explain that working together to solve a problem or reach a decision is an important part of their learning and personal development. Tell them what you expect of them in terms of behaviour (e.g. respect for each other, listening, making decisions) and individual roles (e.g. spokesperson, recorder).
- Explain the task clearly and have it written on the board as well. Tell the pupils what they have to do and what the outcome of their group work should look like. This is very important because if they do not understand what they have to do, the session will get off to a bad start. Allow pupils to ask questions before you start, and be helpful with your answers.

Managing the group work

Check how the groups are doing. Resist the temptation to get involved too soon. Let them struggle with difficulties for a while. If you give them answers too quickly they will come to rely on you rather than on themselves. If necessary, clarify your instructions. It is important to remember that all learning requires us to struggle with difficulty or uncertainty. So expect a lot from your pupils, telling them how confident you are in them as you go between the groups.

Ending the group work

- End with a whole-class session in which you get, for example, one idea from each group until you meet the original objective, or ask each group to tell you about the most interesting thing they learned. Try to make the final session an exchange of ideas rather than you telling them what they have missed.
- Summarise the work of the groups in a way that makes them feel proud of what they have done. Also, ask them to tell you how well they thought they worked in a group. This gives you a clue about their own response to group work.
- Finally, think about how well you did in managing the group session. Recognise the parts you did well and note those areas where you could have done things differently to make the groups more effective. Use this information to develop your techniques for the next time, and note your own improvement and that of your pupils.



TESSA (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa) aims to improve the classroom practices of primary teachers and secondary science teachers in Africa through the provision of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The TESSA OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school

textbook. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic, and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

TESSA OERs have been collaboratively written by African and international authors to address the curriculum and contexts. They are available for online and print use (<http://www.tessafrica.net>). The Primary OERs are available in several versions and languages (English, French, Arabic and Swahili). Initially, the OER were produced in English and made relevant across Africa. These OER have been versioned by TESSA partners for Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, and translated by partners in Sudan (Arabic), Togo (French) and Tanzania (Swahili) Secondary Science OER are available in English and have been versioned for Zambia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We welcome feedback from those who read and make use of these resources. The Creative Commons License enables users to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.

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As well as the main body of pedagogic resources to support teaching in particular subject areas, there are a selection of additional resources including audio, key resources which describe specific practices, handbooks and toolkits.



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