



Primary National Strategy

Group discussion – key teaching points

Planning for group work includes deciding the best size and composition of the groups and which roles children will take.

Group size

- Working in pairs is quick and easy. It demands a contribution from both partners.
- Working in small groups of three or four offers diversity of ideas without becoming threatening or cumbersome.
- Working in larger groups of five to seven produces a greater range of ideas and helps pupils gain the confidence and skill to contribute in whole-class discussion.

Group composition

- Friendship groups are secure and unthreatening and help children build confidence.
- Ability groups enable work to be pitched at the appropriate level of challenge.
- Structured mixed-ability groups ensure a range of views and are especially suitable for tasks which require diversity.
- Mixed- as well as same-language groups offer advantages to children learning English as an additional language, depending on the nature of the task.

- Random mixed-ability groups increase children's experience of working with different partners and different views.
- Single-sex groups are socially more comfortable for some children and can be useful in contexts where one sex tends to dominate.

Roles for group members

- Leader/chair – organises the group, encourages all to participate and to complete the task.
- Scribe – notes main points of discussion and any decisions, checks accuracy of notes with group members.
- Reporter – works with scribe to organise the report on findings, summing up and presenting ideas.
- Mentor – helps group members to carry out the task, supporting them and explaining what is needed.
- Observer – makes notes on how the group works and on different contributions, then shares the observations with the group.

Speaking, Listening, Learning:
working with children in Key Stages 1 and 2

Group discussion and interaction – making it work in the classroom

Working together in pairs and small groups helps children to learn to:

- develop the language and social skills needed for cooperation and collaboration;
- use exploratory language to try out ideas;
- extend their ideas as they share these with others;
- stretch their language as they talk critically and constructively;
- support and build on each other's contributions;
- take their turns in discussion.

Children need varied experience of groups, including:

- for different purposes, such as investigating, problem solving, sorting, planning, predicting, reporting, evaluating;
- with different outcomes, such as carrying out an experiment, constructing an artefact, making a presentation, deciding on actions;
- learning to use talk in different ways, such as discussing, hypothesising, agreeing and disagreeing, questioning, reflecting.

Think-Pair-Share

Children are asked to consider an issue or problem individually, such as reading and preparing a response to an information text, or preparing a news item to be read aloud. They then explain their ideas to a partner. After the pairs have discussed the issue, they may join another pair, share views and emerge with a group conclusion or perspective.

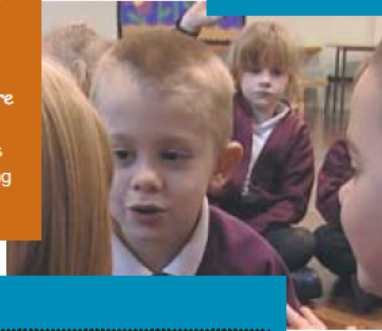


Snowballing

Children are organised to discuss something or to investigate an issue in pairs. The pairs then join another pair to form a group and share their findings. The small groups then join together to make a larger one, for example:

2 → 4 → 8 → 16 → whole-class plenary/centre

This approach can be useful when controversial material is being read and evaluated, perhaps for bias or for portraying stereotypical images.

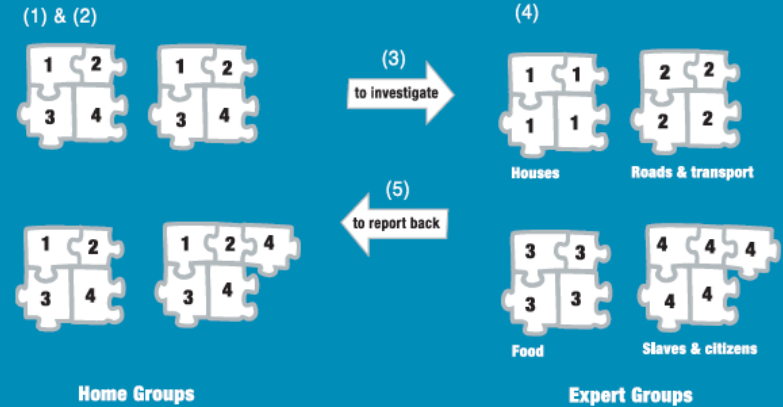


Jigsaw

Jigsaw procedure:

- Organise the class into home groups, preferably of equal numbers.
- Number each child in the home group: 1, 2, 3 or 4. If the numbers in a group are uneven, two children can be set the same individual task: 1, 2, 3, 4, 4.
- Assign each child with the same number (i.e. all the number 3s) to one area for investigation.
- The children now rearrange themselves to form expert groups (i.e. all the number 1s together, etc.) to undertake investigations, discuss their work and agree on the main points to report back to the home group.
- Children re-form into their home groups and each individual member reports back on the findings of the expert group.

Example: The task is to produce an information book about the Romans



Statements game

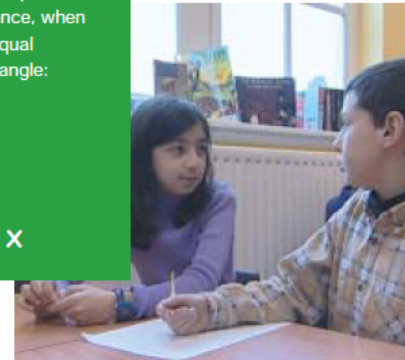
A group is given a set of cards on which statements are written. The group is asked to agree, through discussion, how to categorise the statements, e.g. either agree or disagree with the statement or place them in order of importance or relevance, when some might be considered of equal importance, using the power triangle:

(x = a statement)



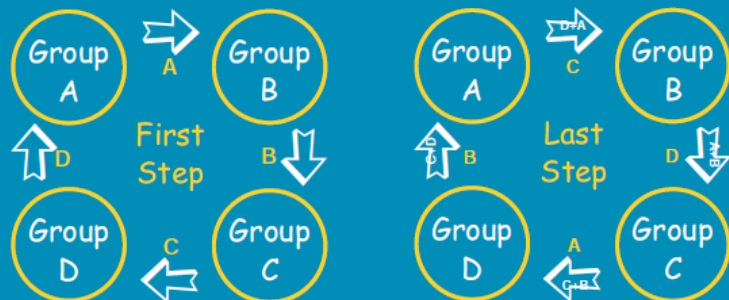
Rainbowing

Each member of a working group is given a colour. When the group task is complete the children form new groups according to their colours. Within the colour groups, children compare findings/discuss what they have achieved. This is a useful way of disseminating and sharing ideas. It helps children to clarify their own understanding and provides an opportunity for them to question others and to seek justification for any viewpoints. It is a useful technique for reading and critical evaluation of fiction or poetry. It can also be used for drafting and redrafting, when children work on a story starter in one group and then, in their colour group, pool ideas and draw out the best features. The process can then be repeated for the next phase of a story.



Envoys

This is a method of disseminating ideas and information that can overcome a more laborious and repetitive procedure of having each group 'report back' to the whole class. Once each group has completed its initial discussion, it sends out one member as an envoy to the next group. Envoys move round all the other groups in turn explaining/sharing ideas gathered from the groups they have visited.



Information gap

Choose a topic that can be divided into two complementary parts, for example, a comparison of the lives of rich and poor children in Victorian times or a discussion of the pros and cons of experiments on animals. Split a small group into two sub-groups and give each group information related to one part of the topic. To complete the task, pupils will need to use talk to share the information and draw it together.

Group discussion – useful classroom techniques