

1. What is group work? Perhaps we should start by saying what it is not.

(a) It is **not** dividing the class into two groups and sending one group to another classroom with another teacher.

(b) It is **not** dividing the class into groups, sitting them at different tables, and having everybody do the same work at the same pace.

2. What is it then? First you divide your class up into groups and then you give each group its task. You can either give them all the same kind of work, or if you are very energetic, organize different activities for each group. The groups then get on with their work.

3. Group work has a lot of advantages in foreign language teaching.

(a) Each pupil gets a lot more practice than he would normally.

(b) The pupils are actively participating and interacting with each other.

(c) Because each pupil is allowed to talk and laugh with his friends, he enjoys learning much more.

(d) It gives the teacher a rest from directing the class as a whole. He/she can now go round the class seeing how each group is getting on.

4. But of course it has its disadvantages too. The main ones are:

(a) The class is less easy to control unless it has been well trained.

(b) There is usually a lot more noise as more people are talking.

(c) The teacher needs to do quite a lot preparation.

(d) It is not suitable with very young children.

5. We see very little group work being practised in our classrooms. Why are teachers reluctant to use what would seem to be a very efficient and enjoyable technique? There are many possible reasons.

(a) Many teachers are very conservative. They

don't like to try anything new.

(b) Many teachers have tried it once, it has failed, and they have given up.

(c) Many foreign language teachers are only happy when their class is repeating together.

(d) Many teachers are very authoritarian. They are afraid order will break down if they let their students work in groups.

(e) Many teachers don't have time to prepare for group work.

(f) In actual practice it may be difficult to organize with large classes, although in theory it should be easier to deal with small groups.

6. When should you use it? At the beginning when you are training pupils to work in groups you should spend no more than about ten minutes on it. You should use it after your presentation phase and after using other practice techniques. It is very suitable for revision and consolidation work.

7. You can use it to give your pupils practice in all the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

8. **Substitution dialogues.** Here is an example.

Each group has a set of ten colour postcards, showing different places in Malaysia.

S1 : (Picks up 1st card) Have you ever been to the National Park?

S2 : Yes I have, as a matter of fact.

S1 : What did you do there?

S2 : I went for a walk in the jungle.

S2's second answer can either be a truthful one, or it can be cued by the use of other pictures or written cues.

The dialogue is called a substitution dialogue because the main part remains the same. Only the underlined words change.

The exercise might go on like this.

S3 : (Picking up another postcard) Have you ever been to Kuala Trengganu?

- S4 : Yes I have, as a matter of fact.
 S3 : What did you do there?
 S4 : I went for a trip on the river.

Using pictures in this way means that the teacher has to prepare enough sets for all the groups, because all the groups will be working **simultaneously**, though of course, not at the same rate.

In order to train the pupils so that they know what to do the teacher will have to make use of a demonstration group. This group comes to the front of the class. The teacher, watched by everyone else in the class, shows the group what it must do, and what each member must do. Once the whole class has understood what to do, all the different groups can start work on their own.

9. Here are some more examples.

(Picks up a picture of a school)

S5 : What do we come to school for?

S6 : We come to school to learn.

(Picks up another card)

What do we go to a butcher's for?

S7 : We go to a butcher's to buy meat.

(Picks up the next card)

What do we go to a library for?

S8 : We go to a library to borrow books.

S8 : How often do you go to the hairdresser's?

S9 : About once a month. What about you?

S8 : I go once a month too.

S9 : (Picks up a picture of a dentist)

How often do you go to the dentist's?

S10 : Every six months. What about you?

S9 : I go once a year.

10. As you can see group work needs a lot of preparation on the part of the teacher. He needs a stock of pictures, enough for all his class.

The lack of suitable pictures is probably the main reason why many teachers do not use group work.

11. But, in fact, you don't need pictures to carry out group work. It is better, of course, if you do, because then each group can handle them and concentrate more on what they are doing. Also the pupils will see that you are going to quite a lot of trouble to help them.

Instead of cueing the substitutions with pictures you can write them up on the blackboard.

S10 : Where shall we go after school?

S11 : Let's go down to the river.

S12 : No, I think we should go home.

S11 : Why don't we go down to the river first?

S12 : Oh, all right.

Possible substitutions might be:

go for a walk

play takraw

have a game of marbles

go and visit my grandfather

go down to the railway station

buy some chewing gum

You could elicit the substitutions from your pupils. You ask them a question like 'What do you do after school?' and they give you their answers. After each one you write it up on the blackboard. The pupils are helping to write their own substitution dialogues.

12. Where do I get substitution dialogues from?

You can always make up your own. You can base them on structural items from the syllabus or on items from the textbook you are using. Once you devise the basic framework the pupils can suggest the substitutions.

There are several books on the market which contain dialogues of this type. They are:

- M F Jerrom and L L Szkutnik. **Conversation Exercises in Everyday English** Books One and Two (Longman)
- M Ockenden. **Situational Dialogues**. (Longman)
- J Y K Kerr. **Picture Cue Cards for Oral Language Practice** (Evans)

Some of the dialogues will need adapting to a Malaysian background.

13. Other uses for group work:

Listening comprehension:

- One person in the group reads out a few sentences, the others try to understand.
- A tape is played. All the members try to work out what is being said.

Speaking:

- Members recite dialogues they have memorized.

- (b) Question and answer work on a text or dialogue. (The questions can be written on a card.)
- (c) Drills.
- (d) Exercises from the textbook.
- (e) Games, e.g. Anagrams. A number of scrambled words are on the card. Members have to work out what they are. A time-limit makes it more exciting, e.g. CRIE – RICE, etc.
- (f) Avoiding Yes and No. Group leader asks the others questions (which can be written on cards). The others must answer without using Yes or No.

- (b) Reading through material covered orally in class.
- (c) Textbook exercises on vocabulary.

Writing:

- (a) Exercises and guided compositions need not always be done individually. Pupils can learn how to help each other.
- (b) Short dictation exercises.

14. To make group work succeed the teacher must believe in it. He must see the advantages and be prepared to overcome the problems. It is a pity it is not used more in our classrooms because it increases each individual pupil's practice many times. The important thing is to prepare for it well, and not give up after the first attempt.

Reading:

- (a) Doing texts with multiple choice questions.



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