

***Getting to Grips
with Group Work***
in careers education and guidance

- A handbook for tutors -

Cegnet

Supporting Careers Education and IAG

Overview

'Getting to Grips with Group Work' will help you to introduce and use group work activities in careers education and guidance in your school. It:

- guides you through the steps you need to take
- offers training ideas, materials and activities
- suggests how you can use group work with learners of differing abilities and ages
- signposts useful resources to help with developing your approach to group work.

This pack will be updated as provision and practice develop.

We suggest that you use the contents list to help you decide which parts of the pack to use. If group work is new to you, we recommend that you start by reading the background information and doing the group work quiz on page 5.

The best way to use this pack is to dip in and out according to your needs!

Further information

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Background Information

Key Points Briefing

What do we mean by group work?

A flexible definition

Group work involves two or more young people working jointly to achieve agreed goals over a specified period of time. It is a way of facilitating learning in a socially dynamic environment. This definition tells us:

- The composition of groups can vary. A pair is the smallest group and there is no upper limit, but size matters (see step 2). How young people are put into groups also needs to be managed (see step 2).
- Groups are work units. They share out tasks to achieve agreed goals. They need to set their goals (see step 1) and organise their work (see step 2).
- Groups are also psychological and social units and they have a lifespan. Young people interact with each other and perceive themselves to be in a group. Over the course of its existence, the social interactions and productivity of the group changes. These processes need to be managed (see steps 2-4).
- Groups need to achieve their goals at the same time as looking after their members (see step 5).

What do we mean by careers education and guidance?

An holistic definition

Thinking about your career is rather like thinking about your health or your finances - some people take conscious steps to promote it while others don't give it much thought. There are risks and drawbacks to not being aware of your own potential to have a career. Young people have one career which is part of their life as a whole. It is primarily concerned with their choices and experiences of learning and work. They can influence the rewards and satisfaction they get from their careers by clarifying their values - What do they want to give and get from their working life? But optimistic planning and decision-making is only part of their experience of career. Future events are unpredictable. Young people are aware of this through their school careers before they even set out on life's wider journey. Yet it is human nature to want to make sense of and tell your own story - both its successes and its setbacks. A career (and life!) is lived forward but made sense of backwards.

The key purpose of careers education and guidance is to assist young people's career learning, career development and career planning. The central role of the tutor alongside other important adults in young people's lives is to help them construct their own career and compose their own autobiography.

For young people, it is the beginning of an 'epic' journey (McGowan and Barnes, 2006).

Exploring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking inwards - reflecting on their strengths, needs and priorities. • looking outwards - understanding the opportunities in learning and work.
Preparing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing initiative and enterprise by gaining skills, experience and contacts to build up their 'career capital' • developing the skills to present themselves well to others
Investing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting goals and planning for the future • seeking and using career guidance to get expert information and advice
Changing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making and acting on decisions • having the confidence and skills to manage changes and transitions in their lives

Why group work is necessary

Research shows the important role of social interaction in improving young people's thinking and learning

It also shows that under the right conditions young people perform tasks better in the presence of others. They experience increased arousal and heightened attention when they are aware of an audience and that others are evaluating their performance. This aroused state is more likely to lead to enhanced performance, especially among young people who have skills and experience appropriate to the task in hand.

Why group work is needed in careers education and guidance

Structured co-operative learning activities in the tutor group have an important contribution to make to students' career learning, planning and development. Group work encourages active participation and enables students to take more responsibility for their own work.

Whole person learning

Career learning involves feeling as well as thinking, the development of the 'social self' as well as the 'personal self'.

Social learning

Young people need to learn how to join work teams and make an effective contribution as a team member. Transition skills and confidence are a central theme of careers work. Transition refers to people's ability to effect changes in their lives. The first few days in a new job can be a crucial test, especially if the individual is faced with a tricky initiation rite, e.g. being sent to ask for some elbow grease! They also need to learn how to welcome newcomers into the group to which they already belong.

Co-operation and competition

Group work models the business environment. It gives students experience of working in teams to achieve tasks. Much of the work which is done by people in industry involves internal co-operation by work teams, departments, whole companies to generate products and services.

These products and services are traded competitively in the market place. Group work in the classroom can model this environment too by pitching groups against each other, e.g. in business simulations or games where groups develop products or services and compete against each other to have them judged as the best.

It is important, therefore, that the careers programme focuses on 'learning about groups' as well as 'learning in groups'. Ideas for helping students to evaluate the effectiveness of the groups to which they belong is included in step 5.

Disclosure

From time to time, careers education and guidance requires students to reveal personal information and feelings. It can be difficult for a student to admit an interest in a particular job which is stereotyped and run the risk of being laughed at. However, for students to understand their career development, they need to be able to talk openly about who they are and what they would like to do.

Small groups, especially pairs, are helpful when students need to disclose sensitive personal information about themselves in order to continue to learn. Most students dislike talking about themselves in a public arena; but may feel more relaxed in discussing personal issues with trusted partners.

Insecurity erodes students' willingness to take the risk of personal disclosure. Evasion and opting out will follow unless the activity is clear, ground rules have been established (confidentiality, right to pass, etc.) and relationships in the group are mature.

What do you know and feel about group work?

Circle your answers and then check them against the answer box.

<p>1. Ensuring the participation by all the members of the group becomes more of a problem when:</p> <p>a) the group have been together for a long time</p> <p>b) the group is mixed gender</p> <p>c) the group size increases</p>	<p>2. One of the advantages of randomly-formed groups is:</p> <p>a) they enable participants to work with people they know less well</p> <p>b) they may experience personality clashes</p> <p>c) they will focus on achieving the goal rather than building friendships</p>
<p>3. John Adair said that the role of group leaders is to build the team, develop the individual and:</p> <p>a) show initiative</p> <p>b) achieve the task</p> <p>c) set the goal</p>	<p>4. 'Norming' is the stage in group development when:</p> <p>a) the group is most effective</p> <p>b) individuals get acquainted with one another</p> <p>c) individuals share expectations of how they should act in the group</p>
<p>5. A collection of individuals sitting together but working separately is sometimes referred to as:</p> <p>a) a team</p> <p>b) an aggregate</p> <p>c) a virtual group</p>	<p>6. Attaching too much importance to maintaining unanimity and consensus rather than looking critically at all options is known as:</p> <p>a) groupthink</p> <p>b) passenger behaviour</p> <p>c) free-loading</p>
<p>7. Fear of assessment can produce the following behaviour:</p> <p>a) right-answerism</p> <p>b) knife edging</p> <p>c) cliqueishness</p>	<p>8. A fishbowl is a way of:</p> <p>a) generating ideas by free association</p> <p>b) facilitating small group discussion within a larger group</p> <p>c) creating a supportive environment for students to explore their thoughts and feelings</p>

Explore your own attitudes and feelings to group work. There are no right and wrong answers to this part of the quiz, but you might like to check your responses in three months time to see how you've changed.

	😊	😐	😞
I feel confident about managing group work in tutorial periods			
I feel that effective group work will improve the learning and development of my students			
I feel that I have the skills needed to develop group work activities			

Answers

Question	Answer	If your answer was different, this is where you can look in the pack
1	c	Step 2
2	a	Step 2
3	b	Step 5
4	c	Step 2
5	b	Step 2
6	a	Step 4
7	a	Step 4
8	b	Methods and techniques

Ideas?

Assess your own training needs - Use the quiz to help you decide which parts of the pack you want to look at first.

Before and after - Do the quiz before and after you have worked through the pack and see how you've changed.

Step by step guide to introducing and using group work

1. Sort out your purpose

The organisation of group work flows from clarity of purpose.

For example, if your main aim is to simulate the work groups or teams that individuals may find themselves in at work, you may decide not to organise the groups on a friendship basis. Of course, people do make friends with people they work with, but young people need to understand how in industry you need to work and get on well with any group of people. (It is easier if you respect your colleagues.)

What do you want to get out of group work? read the cards below which give reasons for doing group work. Cut them out and rearrange them in priority order using the 'diamond nine' pattern. Add your own reasons as you feel appropriate.

Young people will be able to learn from one another	Individuals in the tutor group will relate to each other better
If the class develops into a mature group they will learn more	I will be able to make less use of passive methods and greater use of discussion, role-playing and small group projects
Students' behaviour will improve when they have acquired group work skills	Group work will stimulate their creativity and imagination
Group work activities will be more fun for students	Students will take more responsibility for their own learning
They will be developing 'team work skills' which are an important aspect of employability	Their communication skills will improve

Set goals for the group work

Goals help to establish the purpose of the group, clarify the opportunities offered by the group work and encourage a better sense of co-operation.

Where goals are ambiguous or absent, individuals may follow their own hidden agendas instead.

Different ways of setting goals are shown in the 2x2 box below.

	Without negotiation	With negotiation
Teacher-led	Set by teacher without negotiation = imposed	Set by teacher after negotiation = contracted
Group-led	Set by a group member without negotiation = controlling	Set by negotiation within group = collaborative

Think of the pros and cons of each of these approaches, e.g. the teacher (as the authority and subject expert) may set the goal but students' motivation and effort remain low because they fail to see the relevance of the imposed goal to their own needs. The level of 'ownership' of collaboratively agreed goals will be higher than for goals which are imposed without discussion.

2. Think about how you will organise it

Young people's previous experience of group work

Think about young people's prior experience of group work. If they have little experience, it is helpful to do a lot of talking about roles, skills and attitudes within the group to build up young people's vocabulary and understanding of effective group work.

Size matters

You need to decide on group sizes beforehand. Group size should suit the purpose of the task. The pros and cons of different sized groups are illustrated in the table below.

Size	Pros	Cons
Pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used for intimacy and trust, feeling safe and privacy in feedback • Good for getting everyone involved and avoiding passenger behaviour • Useful for quick warm-up/ice-breaker exercises and small-scale tasks • Can be used for taking risks • Helps with reaching agreement quickly • Can be used for leaderless discussion • Can be useful where a stronger student helps a weaker one (peer tutoring) • Established couples usually work well together but there are risks • Easy for students to arrange to meet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pairs can fall out • Problems can occur if either student is absent, or lazy or domineering • Insufficient people to provide a range of perspectives • Students miss out on the chance to work with other people if they stay in the same pairs for a long time
3-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members can communicate with each other easily • Sharing out work between group members is manageable • Still relatively easy for groups to arrange to meet • Groups can subdivide if necessary, e.g. into singles, pairs (dyads) or trios (triads) • Groups can play to the strengths of individuals and the qualities and abilities they bring with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of passenger behaviour as group size increases • Individuals can feel marginalised, e.g. the odd one out in a trio, the shy person • Leadership becomes more of an issue as group size increases – having an odd number can help if you need a casting vote • Becomes more difficult to ensure equivalence of tasks as group size increases
8-30+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used for substantial tasks • Can be useful for generating a variety of ideas through discussion and debate • Can be used to make things public • Can be used to communicate with the whole membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group processes and structures need to be more carefully planned to ensure effective participation by all • Group productivity can be reduced without skilled facilitation and leadership

Group composition

Make sure that the composition of the group is 'fit for purpose'. Consider the pros and cons of these grouping strategies in relation to what you want to achieve.

Strategy	Issues	Your notes
single sex - v- mixed/	<ul style="list-style-type: none">girls in mixed groups often take on a traditional female rolea single sex group gives participants the space to discuss a specific issue related to their gender	
stratified -v- mixed ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Will you need to differentiate the task in groups stratified according to ability?Higher achievers can support lower achievers in a reciprocally beneficial way	
friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Group cohesiveness will be goodTime on task may suffer if they chatter too much	
random	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Enables participants to work with people they know less wellPossibility of personality clashes	
teacher chosen -v- young person chosen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teacher can choose groups to minimise likelihood of behaviour problems	

Ways of forming groups

Free choice - students choose who to work with and divide themselves into the required numbers for the groups.

Tutor/teacher directed - you decide on membership of groups and allocate students according to your specific criteria (e.g. mixed ability, mixed gender).

Random - ways of doing this include:

- Broken pictures - have envelopes of pictures or postcards pre-cut into jigsaw shaped pieces in potential numbers required for groups (e.g. 4s or 5s), shake

pieces, students each take one piece from box/bag and find others having pieces from the same picture to form groups. This can also work with broken sentences instead of pictures;

- Partners/members - students are given a card with a word or name on it. They then find their partner (if pairs) or other members of their group, either by questioning, discussion or in silence (however you determine). Examples of pairs might be fish/chips, salt/pepper, etc. Examples for groups could be to have soap opera characters for one group, TV programmes for another, composers for a third, shops, newspapers, etc. for others according to the number of groups required. It can be useful to choose a theme linked to what the groups are going to do;
- Line-ups - students line up according to given criteria, e.g. alphabetical - by first name, length of hair - from short to long, eye colour - from lightest to darkest or vice-versa, birthday - numerically according to date in month eg 1st, 4th etc., number of house/home - lowest to highest or vice-versa. When students are in line divide into groups -from front 1,2,3,4,5, - first group; 6,7,8,9,10 - second group and so on, or 1,2,3,4,5; 1,2,3,4,5: etc and group all 1s, 2s, 3s, etc as groups.

Organising a line up or continuum is one way of forming heterogeneous groups. Ask a question or present an issue that offers many shades of opinion and alternative positions. Students adopt a position in the line which represents their view on that question/issue. It is useful to place two chairs to represent the extremes. Ask participants to negotiate their position in the line with others in order to establish that they are in the right place. By numbering off from one end (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), you can create groups that are heterogeneous in opinion.

Formal and informal groups

Formal groups are created in careers education and guidance to complete learning tasks. They co-exist with young people's own informal groups. Informal groups develop to meet personal needs such as the need for friendship. Sometimes, it is appropriate to use informal groups as long as they are productive and do not interfere with the objectives of the careers activity.

How work is organised

A spectrum of ways of working is found in groups:

<p>Group members are sitting together and talking while working but they are completing tasks independently and there is no added value in the 'group product'. (A collection of individuals is sometimes referred to as an aggregate.)</p>	<p>Group members are working co-operatively. They are undertaking separate sub-tasks which will be brought together in a joint group outcome.</p>	<p>Group members are working collaboratively and interdependently.</p>
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Strategies for group work

Careful thought will need to be given to the monitoring of tasks, roles and relationships within groups.

Groups that work together frequently have plenty of opportunity to resolve any difficulties in working together but may lapse into a pattern where members always take the same roles and thus limit their experience and learning.

Depending on how frequently you intend the same groups to work together or for what amounts of time, you may need to consider addressing some basic group work skills with your students before they engage in the actual learning tasks planned such as:

Group forming and trust building - the groups may need to take part, initially, in some activities designed to help them get to know each other and establish communication between them. This will enable them later to focus their attention on topics under consideration.

Developing groups

The tutor can help groups to work more effectively by understanding the dynamic processes within groups. These processes operate in groups which are expected to be short-lived (i.e. expected to perform a single task and then disband) as well as in long-term groups such as the tutor group where members need to work co-operatively over the whole year (and even longer!). Groups have a natural life-cycle made up of five stages. If there is a breakdown at any stage, the group will have to rebuild itself. The stages are:

- forming - getting to know each other, setting ground-rules; establishing an identity for the group;
- storming - raising problems and difficulties; and beginning to resolve them by negotiation and compromise;
- norming - 'gelling'; achieving consensus about the group's purposes; expressing loyalty and commitment to one another;
- performing - working well together, getting on with things;
- mourning - celebrating what has been achieved; marking the end of the group's work so that the individuals can move on in their lives.

Before groups start working, they need to deal with a number of issues and questions as shown in the box which follows.

Issue	Questions to be answered
Class environment	Does the work environment need to be improved? How could this be done?
Group size and composition	Is the proposed group size and composition 'fit for purpose'?
Atmosphere and relations	How friendly or work-like should relationships be?
Member participation	Should all group members participate equally or some more than others?

Goal understanding and acceptance	Do all group members clearly need to understand the goals of the group?
Listening and information sharing	How is information to be shared? Do all group members need to know everything?
Disagreements and conflicts	How should conflicts and disagreements be handled? Do all conflicts need to be resolved?
Decision-making	How should decisions be made - through consensus, majority decision or by the leader?
Evaluation of performance	How should group and member evaluation be carried out? Should the leader or all group members take responsibility?
Expression of feelings	Should members be allowed to express feelings openly and directly?
Division of labour	How are individual tasks to be assigned to group members?
Leadership	Who should lead the group? How should the leader be appointed? What are the functions of the leader?

Source: adapted from Pennington (2002).

3. Get it off to a good start

Check individuals' motivation - Do they value and desire the rewards on offer?

Icebreaker activities can be useful for this. Some simple ones include:

- Each student takes it in turn to introduce him/herself to the others and pick one word beginning with same letter as their name (eg Nervous Nora, Talented Tony) to describe them. Once the first person has started the next person repeats the introduction and adds his/her own introduction. This continues round the group with each person introducing an increasing number of people.
- Something in common - students chat to a neighbour or partner and find two things they have in common and then share with the rest of the group.
- Dream career - each student writes down his/her dream career on a piece of paper which is then folded up and in a box/bag/basket. Students in turn retrieve a piece of paper and try to guess the student to whom the dream career relates.

The activities listed above in 'forming groups' can also serve as icebreakers.

Trust building activities that you could ask groups to perform include:

- Imagine you are stranded on a desert island; in two minutes list as many uses as you can think of for a leather belt.
- Create a logo to symbolise your group.
- Each person in turn completes the sentence: 'One thing you could know about me just by looking at me is...'

Setting ground rules is an important part of trust building in groups. You could outline these and introduce them as a statement of expectations or allow group members to agree guidelines as to how they will treat each other. The second method is often more effective as students are often more willing to observe ground rules they have agreed amongst themselves. Small groups could brainstorm their views and then the whole tutor group combines and by consensus produces an agreed procedure for following when working together. The rules should include:

- Listening to each other and respecting each others' views
- Only one person speaking at a time
- Everyone has the right to 'pass'
- No interrupting
- No 'put-downs'
- Respect confidences, etc.

4. Keep an eye on what can go wrong and if it does get it sorted

If you have concerns about the performance of a group, use the following observation checklist to help you identify the behaviours which are helping or hindering the group. Look at the observations you have made and decide what are the best actions the group can take to improve its performance.

Which behaviours are helping the group to achieve the task?	Which behaviours are blocking the achievement of the task?
Which behaviours are helping to maintain the group (socially and emotionally)?	Which behaviours are undermining the group?
Best next steps for the group	

The group has failed to establish itself and start working effectively

When a group comes together, its members become socialised into the rules, norms and roles in the group. The five stages of group development (forming, norming, storming, performing, mourning) were discussed in Step 2. A group may fail to perform effectively if it misses out on these earlier stages or gets stuck at a certain stage. If necessary, help the group to return to a previous stage in order to overcome the problem and move forward again. The table show strategies for helping groups to make progress at each stage.

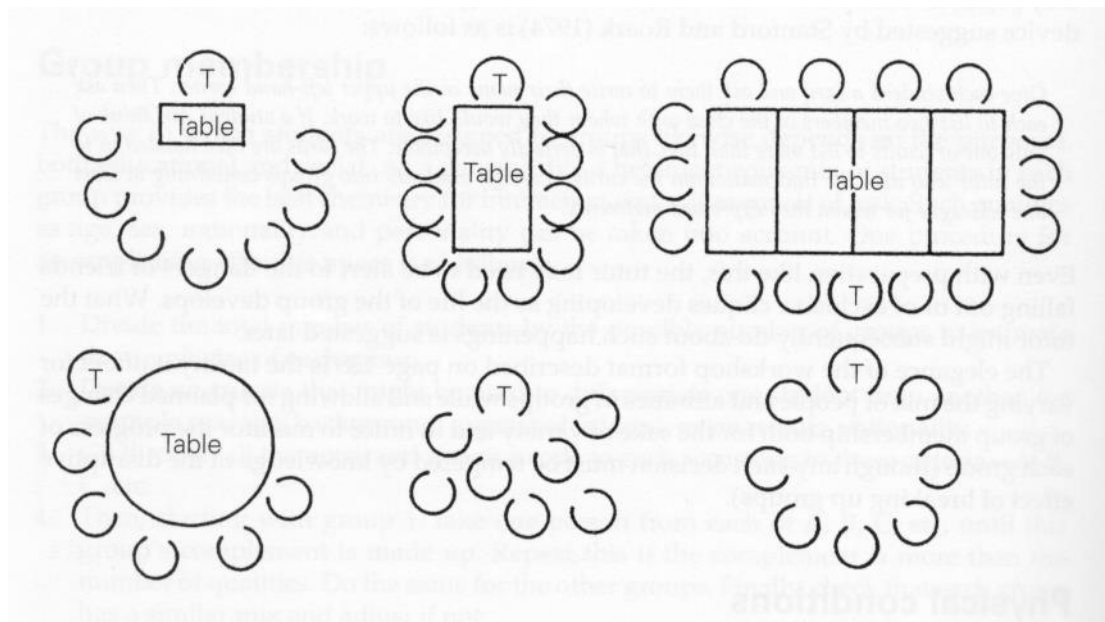
Ways of making progress	
Stage	Possible activities
Forming	<p>Explain what students can expect to happen in the group.</p> <p>Suggest students make name plates for their desk.</p> <p>Play 'adjective alliteration', i.e. 'Happy Holly'.</p> <p>Play 'crazy names', i.e. 'Tom - Ticklish, Organised, Mischievous'</p>
Storming	<p>Ask one of the members of the group to be an observer and give feed back to the group on how they are working as a group.</p> <p>Ask the group to make a T-chart with one column headed 'helping forces' and the other column headed 'hindering forces'. How can they maximise the helping forces and eliminate or reduce the hindering forces.</p> <p>Get the group members to use 'I' messages and not 'you' messages, e.g. 'I feel annoyed when I see you throw paper on the floor' ((accurate information about the impact a person is having on you) is better than 'You are messy' (blame).</p> <p>Practise no-lose negotiation.</p>
Norming	<p>Give the group a simple problem to solve, e.g. calculate the average age in years and months of the members of your group.</p> <p>Give the group an issue to discuss, e.g. What changes should be made in our school? and say that each person in the group must contribute once.</p> <p>Give the group a broken information exercise to complete, e.g. 'Hunt the Hamster'.</p> <p>Give the group a problem-solving challenge to complete, e.g. Survival on the moon.</p>
Performing	<p>Suggest that the group takes a short break to discuss how well they are performing the task and what they could do differently or better.</p>
Mourning	<p>Use a round robin format and have each student tell the group what he or she thinks is the best thing that has happened during the group's lifespan.</p> <p>Suggest that students record the group's achievement in their Progress Files.</p>

The group has got stuck

There are a number of reasons why this may happen. Perhaps, the group is allowing relationships within the group to take priority over the completion of the task or the group may not be certain what its task or purpose is. If members of the group are stuck in assumed or fixed roles, now may be a good time for them to take on new roles.

The environment is unhelpful

It is unlikely that you can change the shape of the room, but you may be able to move the furniture (Consider the pros and cons of the seating arrangements below). Consider changing rooms if that is a possibility.



Inter-group competition has got out of hand

Cheating can occur when competition between groups gets out of hand. Build safeguards into the activity, e.g. have a referee or a system of penalties. The spirit of competition can be harnessed as a positive force. It can quicken the pace and intensify the enjoyment of careers activities, especially when the prizes or rewards are perceived as worthwhile. Recent research suggests gender differences in relation to competition – boys are more likely to engage in competitive activities for the sake of it, girls are more likely to when they perceive the rewards are worthwhile.

The group has become set in its ways

Groups become less creative and productive when 'cosiness', 'cliqueishness' and 'groupthink' (see below) set in. This can be a particular challenge with a tutor group which has been together for a long time. Tutor group members will try and resist the tutor's attempts to shake things up so perseverance is called for.

Groupthink has set in

Sometimes, groups attach too much importance to maintaining unanimity and consensus rather than looking critically at all options. This can be avoided by giving the group more time in which to make its decisions. Encourage groups to be on their guard to avoid falling into the groupthink trap, perhaps by asking someone to take on the role of 'devil's advocate'. If there is a group leader, he/she should be impartial during a discussion so as not to unduly influence group members. If appropriate, the group could also set up subgroups.

Lack of participation by group members

Lack of participation by group members may have several causes, e.g.:

- 'right answerism', i.e. fear of assessment. Students know the importance of giving the right answer and can be reluctant to take part in ambiguous activities.
- 'knife edging', i.e. remaining dependent on teacher presence. Students will only participate when the teacher directs the group.
- 'fence sitting', i.e. fear of being judged harshly or inappropriately by group members. Students are reluctant to participate in case they are criticised by group members.
- Breakdown of trust
- Conflict
- Passengers or 'social loafing', i.e. group members who do not pull their weight. Consider whether the 'social loafing' is caused by the group size - if the group is too large for the task in hand, the young person may believe that their individual contribution is not needed and will not be recognised or rewarded. One approach is to make the individual directly responsible for particular tasks. Another strategy is to revive the young person's motivation by helping them to see why the task is relevant and important to them.
- free-riding, i.e. the individual expects to take the credit for the group's success even though their contribution may have been negligible
- sucker effect, i.e. an individual reduces their effort because they don't want to be taken for a sucker
- Unresolved issues relating to the roles of group members, i.e. particular roles needed by the group are unfilled or group members are in fixed roles and the group has become stuck

Possible interventions include:

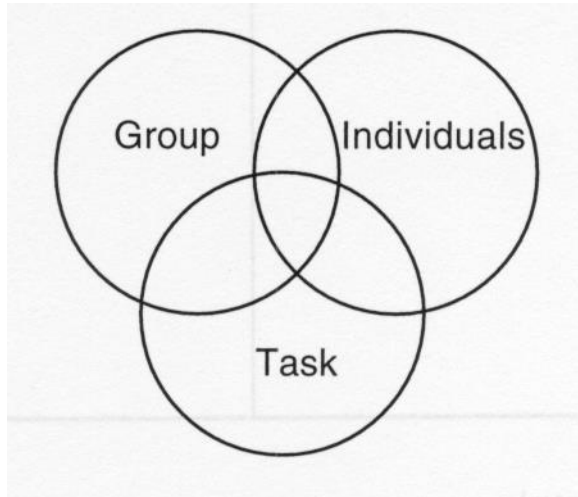
- Ask 'What's going on?'
- Describe what you have observed, e.g. 'In this group, there seems to be a hidden agenda.'
- Confront, e.g. 'Members of the group are not listening to each other.'
- Suggest that members of the group draw up a contract with each other

Absentees

Young people will need help from a peer mentor to 'catch up' when they return to school.

5. Find out and celebrate what went well

John Adair argues that an effective group achieves the task, develops individuals and builds the team.



Five key aspects of effective performance

It is important to ask young people to think explicitly about their group's learning and performance. Ask groups to think about what they did well and what they would do differently or better next time. Focus their reflections on these five areas:

1. Cohesiveness

According to the saying, 'no-one is perfect but a team can be!' A certain level of cohesiveness is a basic requirement for a group to perform effectively. A cohesive group achieves goals, solves problems and provides a positive experience for group members. However, it must not focus too much on having a good time at the expense of getting the work done.

2. Norms

Norms are the social rules (usually unwritten) by which the group operates. Norms can have a negative as well as a positive impact, e.g. sometimes, individuals are placed under pressure to conform or face exclusion from the group. Groups also need to think about how open to change they are.

3. Status

How status issues are handled within the group affects the group's effectiveness. Status may be formal (e.g. the leader of the group) or informal (e.g. someone who brings something of value to the group). Excessive deference to the ideas of the leader may reduce the flow of ideas from other group members. Unfair status differentials may undermine the performance of the group.

4. Roles

Role differentiation refers to how different people perform different roles within a group, e.g. the leadership role within a group varies depending on the size and purpose of the group. Where leadership is required, it is important that the leader balances task achievement and performance with maintaining the well-being of the group as a whole and the relationships between individual group members. This is easier when the leader is accepted by all group members.

The allocation of roles allows for a division of labour, brings order to the group and gives individuals a sense of identity. Groups need different leadership and team roles depending on their purpose. Some roles are not decided by the group but are present because of an individual's personality (e.g. some people are habitually early adopters while others are resisters of change). Individuals may experience role strain or role conflict, e.g. if they occupy more than one role in the group.

It is useful to encourage young people to distinguish between 'task' roles (e.g. getting things done) and 'maintenance' roles (e.g. supporting group members). Sometimes, it is possible to identify two kinds of leader in a group - the task leader and the maintenance leader.

5. Communication

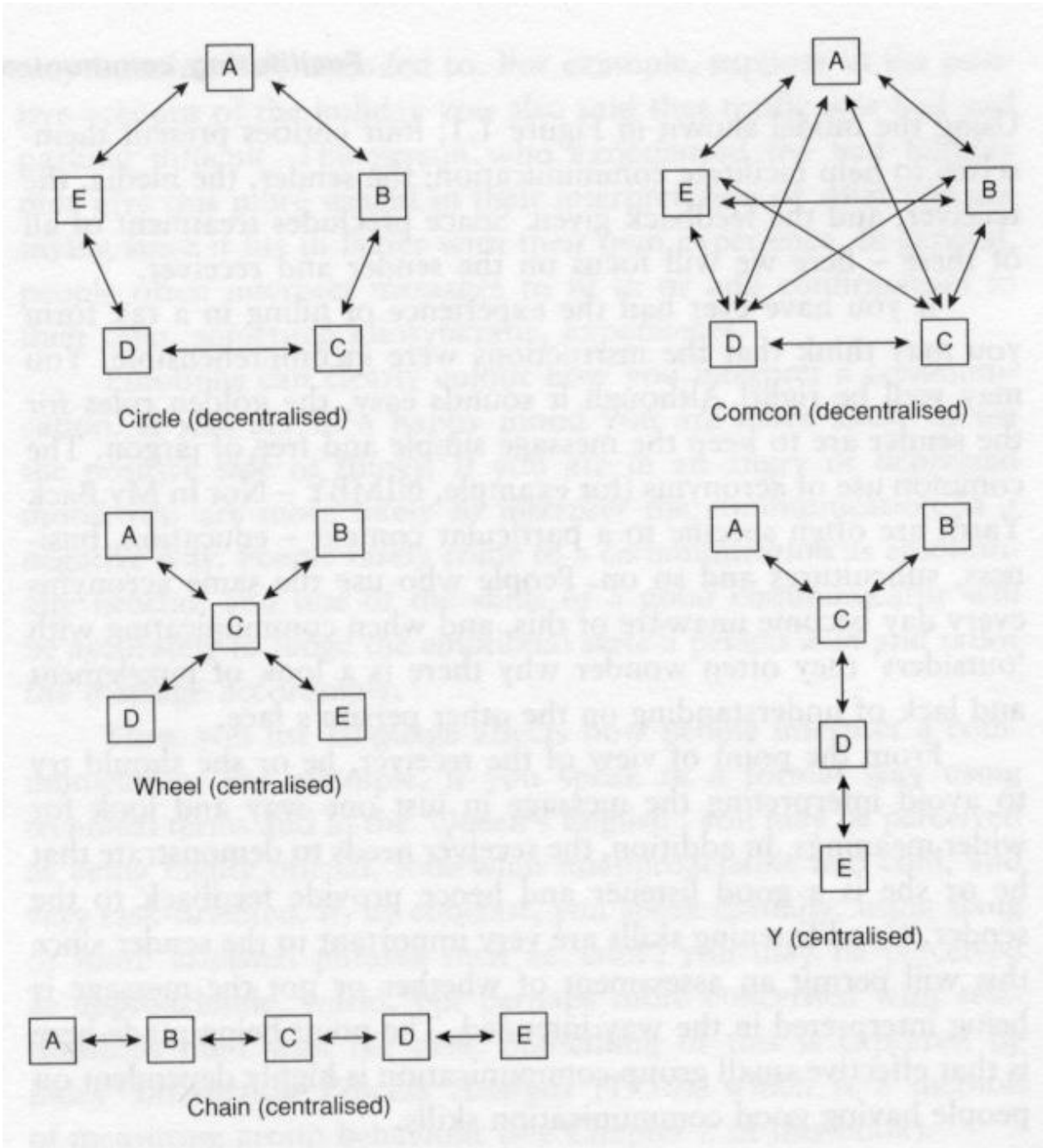
Effective communication within the group is essential for good relationships, motivating members and achieving the task. The sender needs to get the message right, choose the appropriate media to transmit it and check that the receiver has interpreted it correctly.

Ask each group to think about the communication structure they used and the pros and cons of different communication networks. Suggest that the group begins by drawing a diagram of the communication flows in their group (e.g. using one-way and two-way arrows, and making the thickness of the arrow proportionate to the frequency of use). Help the groups to analyse the type of communication network they have drawn - Was it a centralised or a decentralised network (see figure below)? Then ask the group to rate the effectiveness of their group's communication in terms of:

- speed of solving problems
- accuracy of problem-solving
- individual satisfaction

Generally, decentralised networks receive highest satisfaction ratings from individual members. They are faster and more accurate on complex tasks, and there is no central person who can become saturated with information. Leaders emerge in centralised networks and they are faster and more accurate on simple tasks.

This kind of explicit reflection and review of the group's communication network will help young people to become better problem solvers in groups next time.



The following checklist will help young people to evaluate their group's performance.

Circle the number which reflects your group's performance

Effective performance		Ineffective performance
We all got on well together	1 2 3 4 5	We fell out a lot
We all made an effort	1 2 3 4 5	Not everyone made an effort
Everyone felt valued	1 2 3 4 5	Some people felt ignored
We were all clear about our roles and responsibilities	1 2 3 4 5	We did not have clear roles and responsibilities
We made decisions quickly and easily	1 2 3 4 5	We made decisions slowly and with difficulty
We all used active listening skills	1 2 3 4 5	We didn't listen to each other
We all understood what the task was	1 2 3 4 5	We didn't know what we had to do
We sorted out any problems we had	1 2 3 4 5	We didn't sort out our problems

Focus groups can provide quality information and help to assess the views, attitudes and feelings of individuals within a group.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Preparation

- Think about the sample you want. 6-8 is a manageable number for one person. Choose an appropriate mix (e.g. gender, ethnicity, ability). Ideally, choose young people who will be willing to talk.
- Clarify the purpose of the discussion, e.g. to find out if group work is working.
- Clarify your own role as a facilitator in the discussion group, e.g. your role is to keep the discussion focused on the main purpose, to be neutral and not to influence or correct their answers. For example, they may say that they have never had any help with working with others in a group even though you know they have. The important thing is that they do not feel that they learnt anything from it. That is what you need to record.
- Consider how to interest them in taking part in the discussion, e.g. suggest that this is an opportunity for them to improve the programme for next year's students.
- Plan questions in advance to keep the discussion on track but be prepared to follow up a useful line of discussion. Suitable questions include:
 - How did the group go for you?
 - What did you like best about it?
 - What did you like least about it?
 - What did you learn from it (apart from things related to the task)?
 - What else could the tutor do to improve the work of the group next time?
- Arrange the room, e.g. Sitting around a table or in a circle of chairs is best.
- Arrange prompt materials, e.g. the group task sheet.
- Decide how you are going to record the discussion, e.g. by making notes and using a tape recorder. (Better still if you can get a colleague to take the notes for you.)

Holding the discussion

- Put the participants at their ease. (Biscuits and introductions help!)
- Agree how much time you can have (20-40 minutes is the range)
- Agree ground rules e.g. not interrupting each other. Re-assure young people that they are giving their views anonymously.
- Ask open-ended and challenging questions e.g. What have you really valued about the group work? What do you understand or are able to do better than you could before?
- Encourage everyone to contribute so that you get a balanced and representative impression.
- Avoid side-tracks.
- Thank participants for taking part.

Afterwards

- Analyse your notes/recording and make evaluative judgements on the outcomes which are being achieved.
- Consider this evidence alongside other evidence (e.g. young people's work, your observation of groups in action) in order to assess the effectiveness of the group work.
- Consider your evidence alongside the evidence from other focus groups (Generally, it is advisable to hold at least three focus groups so that you do not miss out on the full range of views.)

Training ideas, materials and activities to support group work

Professional development tips for tutors

The following suggestions will help you to develop your own professional practice in managing group work.

- Think about each group to which you belong. What role(s) do you have in the group? Would you say that you had a preferred role? What skills have you developed which are useful to the group? How effective do you think the group is?
- Keep a feelings log. Record the successes and setbacks you experience when running group work activities. At an appropriate time, focus on what went well and the reasons for it. Think what you would do differently next time to overcome and difficulties or problems you faced. Make a list to remind you how to run group work effectively.
- Complete a critical incident review
- Review your own contribution to the effectiveness of the group work in the classroom:
Did the groups have a clear brief?
To what extent did your interventions contribute to the learning and effectiveness of the group work?
Have you helped individuals to talk explicitly about how groups work and their role in contributing to group effectiveness?
Did you deal with any equal opportunities issues (e.g. gender or race discrimination) which emerged during the group work?

Feelings Log

Date	Notes	++	+	-	--

Critical incident review

Another option that can be used is to carry out a **critical incident review** of a particular group work activity or issue. Think about what happened and then apply the following stages:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Describe the incident, what actually occurred.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">When and where did the incident occur?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">What was your role, including how you felt at the time?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">How did you deal with the incident?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Who else was involved and what was their role?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">What challenges emerged from the situation?	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What went well and why? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did not go so well and why? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you do differently if or when the same incident occurs again? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you learnt from the incident? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has it affected (or could do) your professional practice? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there any part of the incident that you need to explore further? You may wish to do some background reading in order to apply theory to practice and clarify your learning. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What else do you need to know in order to extend your professional practice? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider any areas of practice which you identified specifically from the incident that you wish to develop. 	

Methods and techniques

Forming groups

You will need to decide:

- the optimum group size for particular activities. Small groups with 3 to 5 members are more likely to ensure that all participate actively. Larger groups may need you to act as chairperson some of the time.
- how to group. The following is a selection of ways in which groups can be formed:
 - Free choice* - students choose who to work with and divide themselves into the required numbers for the groups.
 - Tutor/teacher directed* - you decide on membership of groups and allocate students according to your specific criteria (e.g. mixed ability, mixed gender).
 - Random* - ways of doing this include:
 - Broken pictures - have envelopes of pictures or postcards pre-cut into jigsaw shaped pieces in potential numbers required for groups (e.g. 4s or 5s), shake pieces, students each take one piece from box/bag and find others having pieces from the same picture to form groups. This can also work with broken sentences instead of pictures;
 - Partners/members - students are given a card with a word or name on it. They then find their partner (if pairs) or other members of their group, either by questioning, discussion or in silence (however you determine). Examples of pairs might be fish/chips, salt/pepper, etc. Examples for groups could be to have soap opera characters for one group, TV programmes for another, composers for a third, shops, newspapers, etc. for others according to the number of groups required. It can be useful to choose a theme linked to what the groups are going to do;
 - Line-ups - students line up according to given criteria, e.g. alphabetical - by first name, length of hair - from short to long, eye colour - from lightest to darkest or vice-versa, birthday - numerically according to date in month eg 1st, 4th etc., number of house/home - lowest to highest or vice-versa. When students are in line divide into groups -from front 1,2,3,4,5, - first group; 6,7,8,9,10 - second group and so on, or 1,2,3,4,5; 1,2,3,4,5: etc and group all 1s, 2s, 3s, etc as groups.

Learning strategies

You will need to decide the most appropriate and effective approach to help students achieve the learning outcomes intended. The following suggestions explain some of the techniques which can be used to promote students' career learning and development.

- **Blank...Blank...**

This technique encourages students to read a passage for meaning. If you have a paragraph relevant to the topic being discussed (e.g. a passage on the future of work), blank out every seventh or tenth word with correction fluid. In small groups, students have to fill each blank with what they think is the best possible word for the context. This will help the students to concentrate on the meaning of the passage and encourage valuable discussion when they compare their versions with the original.

- **Brainstorming**

This technique is used to generate ideas, suggest possibilities and find solutions to problems by free association. Members of the group call out their thoughts which are recorded on flip-chart paper or a board for all to see. At this stage, the group does not interrupt the flow of ideas by asking questions or making critical comments. After the brainstorm is over, the group begin their discussion and plan what they are going to do.

It is a technique designed to help groups be more creative and to produce as many new ideas as possible. It was developed by Osborn (1957) to encourage groups in business and industry to think more innovatively. Pennington (2002) summarises the tips for successful brainstorming as follows:

1. Set a time limit for the brainstorming session - up to 30 minutes is normal.
2. One person needs to agree to act as the recorder, to write down the ideas generated.
3. Each individual should offer ideas that come to mind with no discussion, comment or detail.
4. Individuals should not attempt to hold back any ideas they have.
5. Avoid any criticism of your own or other people's ideas during the brainstorming session.
6. Build on other people's ideas wherever possible.
7. Encourage or ensure that each person in the group is able to contribute equally.
8. A practice session, using a different problem, helps to ensure that the above rules are followed.

Individuals in a group sometimes think that the group is performing better than it actually is. Brainstorming often produces this 'illusion of group effectiveness', possibly because the individuals tend to find the experience enjoyable. The barriers to effective brainstorming are:

- production blocking, i.e. people forget their ideas and have fewer ideas when they have to wait their turn to speak or they are distracted by other people's ideas;
- evaluation apprehension, i.e. anxiety about suggesting ideas which may be ridiculed by others;
- coasting, i.e. individuals ease off generating new ideas because they wrongly perceive that the group is highly productive.

Research evidence suggests that the production of novel and creative ideas may be greater when each member of the group works alone and subsequently pools all their ideas.

Adapted from: Pennington, D.C. (2002). *The Social Psychology of Behaviour in Small Groups*. Hove: Psychology Press Ltd.

- **Broken information exercise**

This technique encourages logical thinking, ordering and sequencing. Select or create a piece of written information, e.g. 'The story of Sam's application to university'. Photocopy it for each group, but cut it up into sections so that each student can have two or three sections. In their groups, the students have to put the sections in the right order. The

discussion can lead to improved understanding. In the higher education example above, students will have a better understanding of UCAS procedures.

- **Bubble sheet**

On the top of an A4 sheet of paper write a question, e.g. 'What are the most important things you should do to prepare for an interview?' Underneath draw some bubbles of different shapes and sizes. Fill in a few of the bubbles with ideas of your own such as 'check the route and how you are going to get to the interview'. In small groups, the students can fill out the rest of the bubbles. Afterwards, they can group their responses in an appropriate way, e.g. the three most important things you need to remember.

- **Buzz groups**

Buzz groups are a way of spreading participation in a large group. Subgroups of four or so students form to discuss an issue for a short time. Reporters summarise the ideas and feelings of their group without necessarily indicating which students expressed them.

- **Card-sort activity**

Students sort and select cards which are already prepared or which the students cut up (and even make) themselves. The purpose of a card-sort is to enable individuals and groups to rate or rank items in importance or priority order, e.g. 'my ten best qualities' from a set of forty cards with personal qualities written or drawn on them. It is sometimes useful to have some blank cards so that students can create their own categories. The results of the card-sort can be transcribed into a careers portfolio/folder; or if the cards are not going to be used again, the students can stick the cards onto a piece of paper. The *diamond-nine* activity (see below) is a useful technique for ranking items.

- **Case Studies**

A case study presents students with a real situation or one specially created to represent particular aspects of reality. Through analysis and discussion of case studies, students gain insights into careers and working life.

- **Circle discussion**

A circle discussion creates a supportive and accepting environment for students to explore their thoughts and feelings and to develop their relationship with others. It is not the same as an advice or sympathy group. As students become more confident and comfortable with circle discussions, they find it easier to disclose information about themselves and to support each other. A small group of students sit on chairs in a circle with their teacher at the same level. The teacher establishes the ground rules (confidentiality, trust, the right to pass, not to interrupt, being positive) and facilitates rather than controls the discussion. The activities should last for 20-30 minutes and begin and end with a fun activity. The teacher helps them to explore with a series of unfinished sentences. Suggested circle discussion topics and questions include:

Transition

- The thing I liked most about my last school is
- The thing I liked least about my last school is
- When I came to this school, I was worried that
- When I came to this school, I hoped that
- Something I would do next time I change school is

Subject choice

- My best subject is ... because
- My worst subject is because
- The most difficult thing about choosing what to study next year is
- What I feel about the help I've had from school is
- What I feel about the help I've had from home is

Qualities needed at work

- At school, the sort of person I am is
- In my part-time job, the sort of person I am is
- Something I need to be better at doing is

Job choice

- The person whose job I'd most like to do isbecause
- The job my parents would like me to do is
- My dream job is
- The job I'm likely to do isbecause ...

Action planning

- Something I have learned to do recently is
- Something I wish I could do is ...
- Something I intend achieving is ...

• **Co-operating Fours**

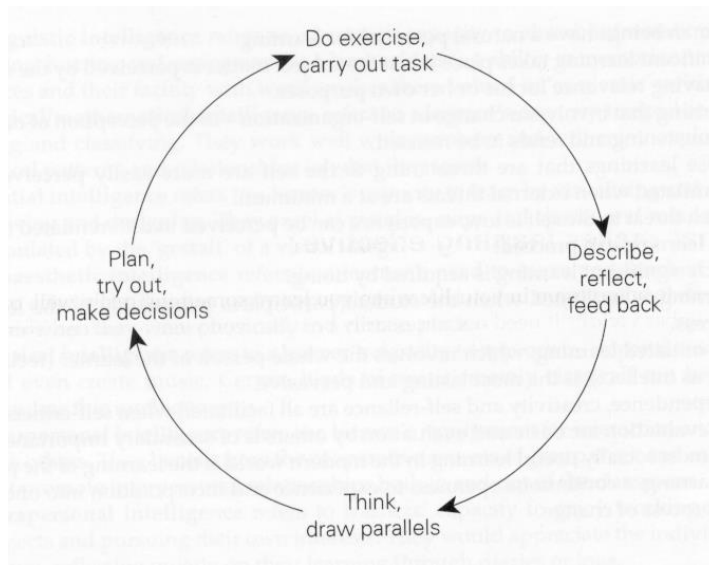
Co-operating fours is a technique for managing project work. Each member takes responsibility for a quarter of the content of the project and is responsible for learning it well enough to teach it to the other three. Once the group members have taught and mastered all four parts, they decide on how they will teach or present what they've learned to the rest of the tutor group.

• **Diamond Nine**

The Diamond Nine structure is a good way of ranking things in order of importance. It also allows students to indicate those things on the same horizontal level which are of equal priority. Students can do Diamond Nine ranking individually, in pairs or in small groups. It can be used to prioritise tasks or values.

```
1
2 3
4 5 6
7 8
9
```

- **Experiential learning**



The first part of the experiential learning cycle is having an experience, doing an exercise or carrying out a task. By describing, reflecting and feeding back their experience to others in the group, individuals start to make some sense of what has happened to them. They are also able to help others in the group to benefit from their experience. The third part of the cycle involves thinking about how they behaved, what they learnt and what they would do in similar situations in the future. In the final part of the cycle, individuals apply or try out what they have learnt in a new situation. If the individual does not complete the cycle, then the educational value of the activity may be less.

- **Fishbowl**

The fishbowl or theatre in the round is a way of facilitating small group discussion within a larger group. The small group is made up of students with a particular interest, expertise or experience relating to the topic under discussion. The small group sits in a circle while the rest of the group sits around in a larger circle. The small group discusses the topic in hand while the other students observe. Empty chairs can be provided in the fishbowl for students from the outer group to come in and join the discussion for a short while, thus assuring wider participation.

- **Helping trios**

Each trio has three roles: *student*, *helper* and *observer*. The role of the student is to ask for help with some problem or task. The role of the helper is to coach the student to figure out the problem or task by himself or herself. The role of the observer is to reflect on what was helpful and what was not helpful in the helping relationship. During a single period, the roles within a trio rotate so that each student performs all three.

Line-ups

Participants adopt a position in a line which represents their view on an issue. It is useful to place two chairs to represent the extremes. Ask participants to negotiate their position

in the line with others in order to establish that they are in the right place. To start with, it is helpful to use fun criteria to get people used to the idea, e.g. line up according to height, shade of hair, length of little finger, etc. Line-ups are useful for bringing issues into the open, holding a quick opinion poll, and organising people into sub-groups (By numbering off from one end, you can create sub-groups that are heterogeneous in opinion).

- **Points of interest**

This is a technique for helping to motivate students and to establish a group consensus about what they want to learn from a particular project or activity. It involves a think-pair-fours-share sequence of steps:

think - students are asked to think alone about four things related to the topic that really interest them;

pair - pairs form to agree on four things that interest both partners, i.e. the eight things the pairs start with are reduced to four;

fours - the pairs form into groups of four and try to agree on four things;

share - each group reports its four things of high interest to the rest of the tutor group.

The tutor records all the points made and tries to make an overall list of from four to eight points. These points become the focus of the learning in the project or activity. They can also be used to divide up the work on the project/activity between small groups.

- **Role-play**

Students have roles, either real or made up, to present realistically or dramatically. Groups can act out a given situation and experiment with different solutions to any problems. Role play helps to develop awareness and understanding of adult work roles and to provide insights into what it feels like to do certain kinds of work.

- **Simulations**

Students play roles in a duplicated real life situation. This helps students gain insights into real situations and to take risks in a relatively safe way.

- **Three-step interview**

This is a technique for encouraging young people to discuss controversial or difficult issues effectively.

1. First, Student A interviews Student B for five minutes. Student A may only ask questions to clarify his/her understanding of Student B's viewpoint. Student C interviews Student D in the same way.
2. After five minutes, reverse the procedure. Student B interviews Student A and Student D interviews Student C.
3. Then, as a foursome, each takes it in turns to present the views of the person they interviewed, i.e. Student A shares what B said, B what A said, C what D said and D what C said. After the initial presentation of views, the group hold a discussion in which individuals are free to hold or change their opinions as they wish.

- **Think-pair-share**

Explain the procedure before you pose the question.

- I'm going to ask you a question
- Think about it in silence for ... minutes (= **Think**).
- Write down your answer so that I can read it.
- When I say, you are going to discuss it with the person you are sitting next to for ... minutes. (= **Pair**).
- Then I'll ask some of you what your answer is and why you think it is a correct answer. (= **Share**).

The question is

(After a few times, the instructions can be shortened).

- **Tutoring pairs**

Tutoring pairs or critical friends is a procedure for enabling students to check and give feedback on each other's work. Each pair takes it in turns to help each other. This emphasises the egalitarian and reciprocal nature of the relationship between the students in each pair.

Career learning activities where group work can help

Challenging stereotyping

Group work can contribute to learning activities which challenge stereotyping. The perpetuation of stereotyping relates to deep-rooted causes at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, class, age, etc. The difference which group work can make in tutor periods or careers lessons is clearly limited, but it can raise awareness of the issues and provide practical support to those individuals trying to escape the limiting effects of stereotyping even if it cannot effect a wholesale change of attitudes.

Gender stereotyping, for example, is a particular problem tending to perpetuate gender segregation in relation to subject and labour market choices. Single-sex group work in mixed schools and colleges has a part to play in challenging stereotyping:

- It enables boys and girls to talk freely about specific issues related to attitudes and expectations of their sex
- Members of the group can be a support group to each other, helping them to reach the point of decision-making and sustaining them in the decisions they have taken.

Sharing subject and occupational interests

Groups can be formed from students with a similar interest, e.g. those interested in studying for a geography degree or in applying for a Modern Apprenticeship in engineering. The advantages of this kind of group work are:

- The group can be facilitated by a personal adviser (careers) who can provide information, advice and guidance
- The group provides peer support for its members
- Members learn from each other and benefit from each other's experiences, e.g. shy members benefit from the questions asked by the more extrovert members

The logistics of setting up this kind of group work appear difficult at first sight, but strategies include:

- Groups meet at lunchtimes and after school/college
- Forming groups from across the whole year group and not just the tutor group
- Enabling the groups to meet by timetable withdrawal (in the same way that students attend individual guidance interviews)

Self-help groups

Young people can come together in self-help groups to share their needs and problems. The purpose of such groups could be:

- behavioural control, e.g. to manage a behaviour problem common to all members
- stress-coping, e.g. to help members deal with stress by supporting each other
- survival, e.g. to help members deal with discrimination or bullying
- personal growth, e.g. to help members improve themselves

This activity can be used at the group forming stage

Who's-in-the-group form

Source: *Developing Effective Classroom Groups* by Gene Stanford and Pam Stoate (Acora Books, 1990)

Complete the form below. Find people in the class who fit each category and obtain their signatures in the space provided. No name should be used more than once.

Debrief Questions:

For which items was it difficult to get a signature?

What have you learned about various people in the class that you didn't know before?

Did you discover anything that surprised you?

1. **A person in this group whose first name starts with the same letter as mine is ...**
2. **A person in this group who likes the same sports as I do is ...**
3. **A person in this group who was born locally is ...**
4. **A person in this group whose hair is the same colour as mine is ...**
5. **A person in this group whose eyes are the same colour as mine is ...**
6. **A person in this group who has read the same book that I have read is ...**
7. **A person in this group who is shorter than I am is ...**
8. **A person in this group whose birthday falls in the same month as mine is ...**
9. **A person in this group who wears the same size shoes that I do is ...**
10. **A person in this group who is taller than I am is ...**
11. **A person in this group who has the same hobby as I do is ...**
12. **A person in this group who likes the same TV programme as I do is ...**
13. **A person in this group who does not have a middle name is ...**
14. **A person in this group who has not been to Australia ...**
15. **A person in this group who I would like to get to know better is ...**
16. **A person in this group whose last name starts with the same letter as mine is ...**
17. **A person in this group who has lived in the same house all of his/her life is ...**
18. **A person in this group who has the same number of brothers and sisters as I do is ...**
19. **A person in this group who likes Maths better than English is ...**
20. **A person in this group whose favourite colour is the same as mine ...**