

# *How Can We Make Group Work More Effective for EAL Students in Secondary?*

## **Supporting EAL Learners Conference, Birmingham**

Elizabeth Mickiewicz, EAL Teacher Advisor

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# Aim:

***To reflect on how we use group work in the classroom with EAL learners and consider how to make it more effective.***

# Session Overview

1. Rationale for group work
2. Issues with group work
3. Characteristics of effective group work
4. Example Lessons
5. Recommendations

# Rationale for Group Work

**Discuss:**

**What are the benefits of group work?**

# Example Benefits

*Gibbons (2002)*

- **increased input** - hearing a range of language
- **Increased output** - interaction, turn-taking and less teacher presence

*Jacob et al. (1996)*

- **supports academic and written work.**
- **aids mastery** of material (Slavin, 1987)
- **builds grammar** (Pica, et.al., 1996)
- **contextualises language** (Gibbons, 2002).

*Long, Adams, McLean, & Castanos (1976; Doughty & Pica, 1984)*

- **more diverse language** functions


# Affective outcomes:

*Gibbons (2002)*

- learners **feel more comfortable** participating

*Slavin (2010)*

- **enjoyment**
- **expanded friendships** (from different backgrounds/ nationalities)
- **greater acceptance** from peers



So..we ask  
students to work  
together  
all the time. ...

*Johnson and Johnson (1987) (cited in Pell et al., 2007)*

- **increase in intrinsic and achievement motivation**

*Galton, Hargreaves and Pell (2009)*

- **positive effect on attitude**

# Issues with group work



Group work is a positive for EAL students, isn't it?!

When asked to go to a group, a secondary student in the mainstream said:

*"I ain't sitting next to him!....He can't even speak English! How am I supposed to work with him?!"*

**Discuss:**

**What other issues with have you found when asking EAL students to work in groups in the mainstream?**

## Some Example Issues

*Pell et al. (2007)*

- **Are pupils' conversations productive?**

*Cowie and Rudduck (1990)*

- Group composition may also lead to **behavioural problems**

*Brinton, Fujiki and Higbee (1998)*

- **Withdrawal** and **aggression** can be a common pupil response

*Fritzen Case et al. (2014)*

- **The nature of an adolescent** can affect the execution of a curriculum

# Characteristics of effective group work

**DISCUSS:**

*In your opinion..*

**What are the characteristics of effective group work?**

# Characteristics of effective group work:

## Exploratory talk:

(Mercer, 1996)

- **Explanations are given/ justified**
  - (Webb, 1991)
- **Learners ask each other questions**
  - (Mercer et al., 2004)
- **There is equality of participation**
  - (Janssen et al., 2010)
- **Content discussions**
  - Whether conversations are socially or content-based (Janssen et al., 2010)
- **Responses are engaged**
  - (Janssen et al., 2010)
- **Opinions are respected**
  - (Mercer et al., 2004)

## Gibbons (2002)

- Principles for planning collaborative activities
- Focus: EAL learners in the mainstream

### **Instructions are coherent**

- **not more complex** than the task (task accessible, language not?)
- pupils can **retell** commands
- provided in **written** form
- **exemplification, modelling** and **paraphrasing** academic vocabulary

### **Outcomes are clear**

## *Gibbons (2002)*

- **understand** task, with appropriate **justification**

### **The task is linked to the curriculum**

- separate language-focused activities are less time-effective  
(Gibbons, 2002)

- **The level of cognitive challenge is appropriate\***
  - \*difficult to achieve (Gibbons, 2002)
  - use of practical activities
  - first language to discuss, read or write
- *Kirschner, et al. (2008) (cited in Janssen et al., 2010)*
  - if a task is unchallenging:
    - **students might deem themselves to be disadvantaged**
    - may not need to distribute the cognitive load

- **The time given is adequate and appropriate**
- (Gibbons, 2002).
  - **disengaged** if too long
  - additional **response time** for EAL
  - opportunity to **review** content and language
- **All members of the group participate**
- Gibbons (2002)
  - lack of confidence
  - **dominant individuals**
  - shyness
- given **roles** to ensure; unique responsibilities; **team management**



# Individual accountability and group goals

- A contrasting argument to Gibbons': key in making group work work (Slavin, 1995, 2009; Rohrbeck et al., 2003; Webb, 2008) (cited in Slavin, 2010)
- a **shared objective** all are striving to achieve or
- **an award reliant on all members learning**
- not focusing on what pupils are doing
  
- Wiliam (2010)
- [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=LK\\_9tWsndEk](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=LK_9tWsndEk)

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- He stresses the importance of:
- group goals and individual accountability
- **opposes the strategy of assigning roles from the outset**
- some learners' focus dips
- recommends **everyone is told that they *may* be the reporter.**

*Is this realistic with  
early stage EAL  
learners?*

## There is an information gap

*Gibbons (2002)*

**Learners have to communicate with each other**

Lack of absence of purpose and authenticity = lack of participation.

## Group composition

*Webb, Nemer, Chizhik and Sugre's (1998) (cited Janssen et al. (2010))*

- **higher ability students** should be represented in a group to ensure a certain proficiency level.

*Denessen et al.(2008) (cited in Janssen, 2010)*

- **medium ability students** give more elaborate explanations when placed with the less able.

## Pupils know how to work in groups

*(Gibbons, 2002)*

- Regardless of the task design, it could fail
- **If students do not possess the ability** to carry it out successfully
- **coach learners**
- be more **explicit with expectations**
- e.g. politeness, volume

# What did I do with this information?

- I devised a tick chart based on these key principles:

## Checklist – Effective Group Work



<b>Principles</b>					<b>How Evidenced</b>			
					well	some	none	n/a
<b>Instructions are coherent</b>								
Language is not more complex than task	Pupils retell commands	Instructions are in written form	Exemplification/Modelling used	Academic English is used then rephrased				
<b>Outcomes are clear and shared with class</b>								
<b>The task is linked to the curriculum</b>								
<b>The level of cognitive challenge is appropriate</b>								
The task is age appropriate	First language is used to discuss ideas	First language is used to read or write	Practical activities support learning	Pupils couldn't complete the activity alone				
<b>The time given is adequate and appropriate</b>								
The material is sufficient to keep pupils engaged		Additional time is allowed for early EALs to process info/ respond						

<b>All members of the group participate</b>							
There is not one member overly dominating	Pupils are given roles	If there is a reporter role, it is not assigned from the outset	Someone has the responsibility to manage the team				
<b>There is individual responsibility and group goals</b>							
There a reward that pupils are trying to achieve		The reward is dependent on all pupils learning rather than doing something					
<b>There is an information gap</b>							
Members need to collaborate with others to get new/ different information	The goal will not be achieved without this information	This information cannot just be copied - pupils have to communicate					
<b>The group composition is appropriate</b>							
Higher ability pupils are represented in each group		Average pupils have the opportunity to explain to lower level pupils					
<b>Pupils have been coached so they know how to work in groups</b>							
Pupils know how to use exploratory talk: e.g. give explanations, ask and respect opinions	Pupils know what is considered polite	Pupils know what volume levels are acceptable for discussions in the classroom					

# Example Lessons

# Your Task

- Look at your lesson
- Review the checklist
- How effective might the task(s) be?

## NB

- *Some descriptors difficult to determine outside the situation*
- *Criteria not equal*
- *Checklist not standardised or conclusive (could give an indication)*



## What was missing in ALL of these?

	<u>Science</u>	<u>Geography</u>	<u>History</u>
Coherent Instructions?			
Clear & shared outcomes?			
Linked to curriculum?			
Appropriate cognitive challenge?			
Adequate timing?			
Everyone participates?			
Group goals & individual responsibility?	X	X	X
Information Gap?	X	X	X
Appropriate group composition?			
Evidence of pupil coaching?	X	X	X

# Recommendations

# Science

- Clearer outcomes:
  - Stating them doesn't mean they are clear to students
- A display?
  - What's the process?
  - What kind of display?
  - What size of display?
  - What language do I need?
  - Provide a model
- Is it group work or individuals working separately, and sitting at the same table?!

# Geography

- Pitch to a panel about their situation
  - criteria to include
  - visual support for early stage EAL learners
  
- Panel decides which aid based on pitch
  - formulate questions prior
  - criteria to consider

# History 1

- Create an information gap
- Only one student can see picture
  - Different students have different sections of picture
  - Barrier in place
  - Pair work not group work

## History 2

- Cards with names and pictures of weapons
- Rank the weapons in order of destructiveness
- Promoting discussion
- Opportunity for focus talk
- More purposeful talk
- Concrete task to support early stage EAL learners

# Geography

- Pitch to a panel about their situation
  - criteria to include
  - visual support for EAL learners
  - Simple sentences
  
- Panel decides which aid based on pitch
  - formulate questions prior
  - criteria to consider

# Coaching students:

- Suggestions:
  - Build up from structured pair work to group work
- Mercer and Dawes (2015)
  - techniques used to coach learners (primary)
- Developing communication skills (primary):
  - *How do we show we're listening? How do we show we're interested? What types of questions do we ask to ask opinions? How do we give opinions?*
  - Will secondary students see this as patronising?



- Alternative Jigsaw
  - Each 'group' has different information
  - The students can discuss/ rank/ make notes in pairs or work alone
- Choose one person from each 'group' to do the focus discussion
  - Others *actively* listen, e.g. each person has some criteria to listen out for – it could be language or content based; early stage EAL students may tally the participation of different people
  - Listeners then feedback to the people that were discussing

### Advantages




- Acts as a model of effective group work – language, turn taking, content that needs to be covered
- Could build up to effective group work
- The person that has to part of the discussion group is not told from the outset

**\*\*Choose a person to report on criteria\*\***

- Set success criteria
- Give 'Team Leader' a concrete task
  - e.g. tick sheet
  - (example next slide)
  - These criteria also highlight expectations and gives grounds for why students '..are not working together properly..'
  - can involve early stage EAL learners

## Representatives of Germany: Tick what they discuss at The Versaille Treaty



<u>Did they talk about...</u>	<u>Great Britain</u> 	<u>France</u> 	<u>The USA</u> 
..who is to <b>blame</b> for the war?			
..what should happen to <b>Germany's armies</b> ?			
.. <b>reparations</b> - who should pay for all of the damage, and how much should they pay?			
..who should own areas of land like <b>Alsace-Lorraine and the Rhineland</b> ?			
..how can we <b>prevent future wars</b> ?			
..should <b>Germany</b> be allowed to have <b>allies</b> ?			
<u>Did they use language to ...</u>			
<b>Give opinions/ ideas?</b> <i>We think...Let me first say... We advocate... We do not advocate... We propose... We are convinced... We would point out....</i>			
<b>Disagree?</b> <i>We totally disagree!... That's preposterous! We accept...however...I'm afraid, there is a concern....</i>			
<b>Ask for an opinion?</b> <i>What's your idea? Wouldn't you say..? Convince me that...Can you explain why...?</i>			
<b>Reach a conclusion?</b> <i>To sum up...Shall we say...? Taken into consideration... In short, we will...</i>			

# Group goals

## *Slavin's ideas:*

- Mixed ability group
  - 'more able' students peer tutor 'less able' students about a particular topic
- Post test
  - each pupil has a differentiated target score
  - anyone getting a higher score than their target achieves a point or points for their team
  - The team gets an overall score
- All teams compared
  - introduces a competitive element in which each team tries to get the highest score

# Other factors to consider

- Train teachers?
  - Many 'text book' answers
  - Time available?
- Friendship groups vs Teacher Selected Groups
  - Yoon (2007)
  - Student frustration
  - Teacher wants 'quiet life'
- Teacher attitude
- Yoon (2007)
  - **Teacher interaction can influence peer behaviour**
  - Are they ignoring students too?!

- Fritzen Case (2014)
  - **Audible differences are more significant than visual**
  - Still problems with large proportions of ethnic minorities
- Rewards – intrinsic vs extrinsic
  - what's more important to individuals
- Individual differences
  - Pell et al. (2007, p.310)
  - **Students unenthusiastic** about schooling
  - Context Institute (1985, 1997)
  - 'blockers'

# How can we make group work more effective for EAL learners?

- Try to incorporate *as many of the principles as possible*. These are particularly key:
- Pupil coaching
  - not easy done
  - requires time
  - needs collaboration of students and staff
- Group goals & individual responsibility
- Information Gap
- We can't account for individual differences but remember:
- **\*\*Effective group work skills need to be learnt and facilitated\*\***

**Thank You 😊**

[Elizabeth.Mickiewicz@Wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:Elizabeth.Mickiewicz@Wolverhampton.gov.uk)

01902 555 284