

## B.Ed. (Foundation & Intermediate) Core Education Studies Course



UMTHAMO

4

## Helping Learners Learn

### Groupwork



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## Helping Learners Learn

# Umthamo 4: Group Work

### Introduction

Every year, two imithamo of your Core Education Studies Course will be in the strand Helping Learners Learn. We hope that these imithamo will help you create situations in the classroom which will enable your learners to learn more actively and effectively. Each umthamo will guide you in planning lessons and reflecting on what has happened in those lessons.



In the first year, the two imithamo you will study are:

- Group work, and
- Creating a learner-centred environment.

Both of these imithamo are concerned with the general topic of learner-centredness. We hope that the second umthamo will build on and add to the first. The first umthamo, on group work, will give you an opportunity to try out a learner-centred style of classroom organisation. The second umthamo will take a more general look at the differences between learner-centredness and teacher-centredness, and will also look at the roles that you play as a teacher.

We would like, once again, to encourage you to use your journal regularly. Record in it anything exciting or interesting which happens in your classroom, or while you are working on tasks set in the umthamo. If you feel that something has changed in your thinking, or that you are very impressed by a certain idea, write it in your journal. If you are unhappy about something, or have an unanswered question, write that in your journal too. As time goes on, you may have a chance to resolve the problem, or find an answer to the question by sharing with a colleague, or in your face-to-face group.



In this umthamo, you will also be required to make notes about specific aspects of group work in your journal. This will help you prepare for the Key Activity.



## **This umthamo**

In the umthamo about learning, you found that there are many things that the learners in your class can do well. They can also think very quickly, and make good decisions, when they need to respond to an emergency. They have many powerful memories, and they have a theory of the world in their heads, which is changing and developing all the time.

Your learners learned many of these things by listening to, and talking to, other people, and by doing things together with brothers and sisters, friends, parents, teachers and neighbours.

In this umthamo, we will think about, and try out, ways of organising learners into groups in the classroom, in order to help them to learn more actively and effectively along these lines.

We would like to suggest that you also work together with a partner, or a small group of teacher-learners, as you work through this umthamo. Discuss the information and the questions together before you write anything down; watch one another's lessons, and give one another feedback.

## **Intended outcomes**

When you have completed this umthamo, you should be able to:

- Plan an activity involving small group work.
- Organise and implement such an activity effectively.
- Critically evaluate what happened and why it happened.





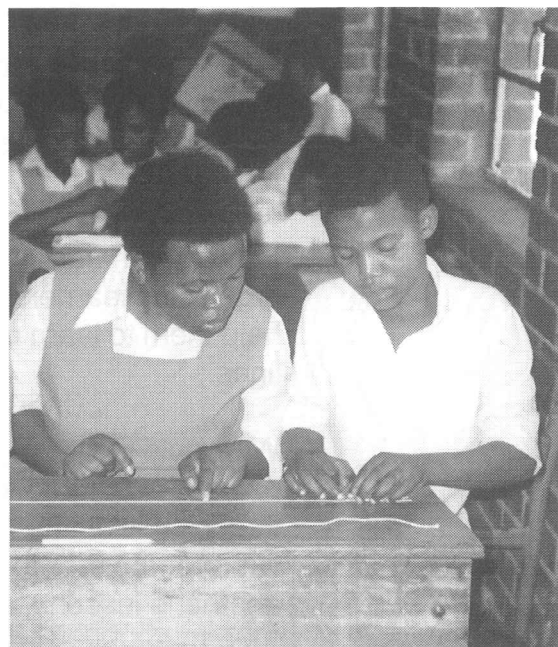
You should take  
about 2 hours to  
complete this unit

## Unit 1 – Classroom management patterns

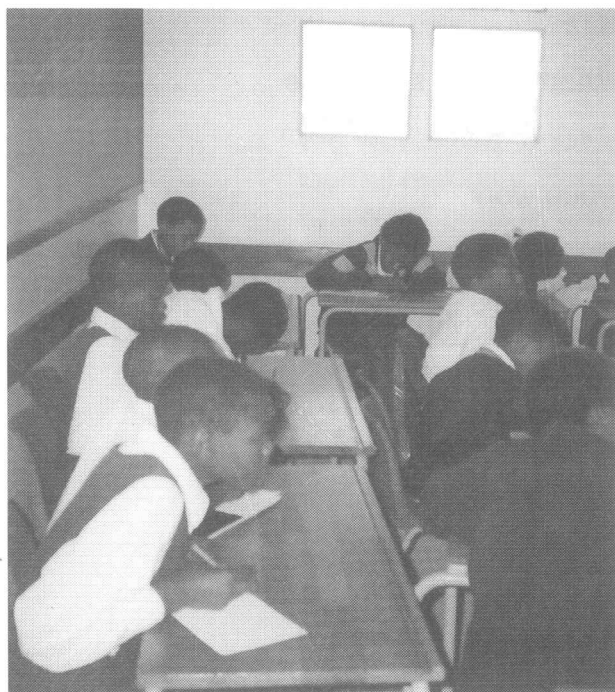
Look at the following pictures of classrooms, and then do the activities on the next page. Put your written answers to the activities into your concertina file.



*Teacher – whole class*



*Pair work*



*Individual work*



*Small group work*



### Activity 1.1 – Your feelings about classroom management patterns

Discuss these questions with a partner, or in a group, and then write down your own responses to the questions below in your journal.

Write the date in your journal. Then write *Helping Learners Learn 1* (after this you can use the initial letters HLL), *Umthamo 3, Unit 1: Classroom management patterns*.

- Which of the 4 ways shown in the photographs above is your *favourite* way of managing learning in the classroom? Why?
- Which of these 4 ways of organising your classroom do you like *least*? Why?

### Activity 1.2 – Selecting different classroom management methods for different purposes

Discuss the following with a partner or a group, and then write down your answers in your journal.

Which do you think would be the best way of organising your classroom for each of the following lessons? Give a reason for your choice, for each lesson. The first one has been done for you. If you disagree with the answer, do it again, giving your ideas. (When you write the answers to this question, write them in 2 columns, as we have done below, one for the method of classroom management, and one for the reason.)

1. You want your learners to do story sums (word problems) in Maths.

<i>Method of classroom management</i>	<i>Reason</i>
<i>Small groups</i>	<i>I would use small groups so that 3 or 4 learners could put their heads together to work out the sums.</i>
<i>Individual work</i>	<i>Once the learners had understood the type of problem, I would let them do some sums on their own.</i>



2. You want your learners to do research on the early history of their own town or village.
3. You want your learners to practise dialogues.
4. You want your learners to learn about the results of soil erosion.
5. You want your learners to do a science experiment.
6. You want your learners to discuss the characters in a story they have read.

### Activity 1.3 – How much do you use each method in your teaching?

How often do you use each of the classroom management patterns? Next week, count the number of lessons, or hours, you spend using each, and write them down. At the end of each lesson, write down which management pattern you used, and for how long. At the end of the week, add up the times for each management pattern. Then draw a table like the one below, and fill in your hours (or lessons) in it.

<i>Method of classroom management</i>	<i>Number of hours or lessons</i>
<i>Teacher – whole class</i>	
<i>Individual work</i>	
<i>Pair work</i>	
<i>Small group work</i>	

### Using a variety of appropriate management patterns

Activity 1.1 has shown that different management patterns suit different purposes. Activity 1.2 has given you a chance to look at the ways in which you manage your classroom.

As you go through this umthamo, we will suggest that you try new ways of helping your learners to learn. This will include trying classroom management patterns which you may not use very often at present. You will have a chance to see what differences they make to the way your learners learn. As you put these ideas into practice, you will develop new





skills. We suggest that you discuss what you are doing with other members of your staff, and with your face-to-face group.

By the end of the umthamo, we hope you will feel comfortable about using a *variety* of teaching styles and classroom management patterns. In the next *Helping Learners Learn* umthamo, we will ask you to repeat Activity 1.3, and see whether the time you spend using each classroom management pattern has changed.

This umthamo will focus on using small groups. Remember that pairs are also a type of group — the smallest of groups. We will look at reasons *why* it is often helpful to learners to give them the opportunity to learn in a group. We will also look at *how* you can organise and run group work, and look at what skills you need.





You should take about 6 hours to complete this unit

## Unit 2 – WHY use group work?

It often seems much easier, especially if you have a large class, to simply teach the lesson to the whole class without disturbing the learners and re-arranging the desks. You are probably wondering whether there is a good reason for group work, and whether group work is worth the effort.

In this section, we will look at reasons why different teachers use groups in much of their teaching, so that you can decide for yourself when to use groups in your classroom.

Start by reading the descriptions of 4 lessons, which appear below. In each lesson, the teacher uses group work. As you read, think about the teacher's reason for using group work.



### READING 1: GROUP WORK IN FOUR CLASSES

#### 1. Group work in religious studies

'I had chosen to study the very long story of Joseph (from the Bible) with my learners. I had already told them the story, briefly. I now wanted them to look at the characters in the story, and at conflicts and dilemmas they found themselves in.

The first thing we did, as a class, was to "modernise" the story, setting it in present-day South Africa. We gave the characters in the story new names, and set it in rural Eastern Cape and Johannesburg. I had divided the story

into sections, and I now divided the class into groups of 6 to 8 learners each. Each group was to convert their section into a scene from a play. They could use song, dance, mime and drama, and present it in a mixture of languages, if that seemed appropriate.

The final "production" was a great success, and was performed for other classes in the same standard. It gave the learners a chance to co-operate and be creative, and it brought out different strengths and talents of the individual learners.'



## 2. Creative group work in a numeracy lesson

I had a class of 40 Grade 1 learners who were enthusiastic and active in their first year of formal schooling. Unfortunately the classroom was very small and crowded. I wanted the learners to be interactive and involved, and to learn how to work together in a small group, sharing ideas.

I divided the class into groups of 5 learners. I then planned a field trip – a walk around the neighbourhood. Each group was given a packet and told to collect as many natural objects as possible – sticks, leaves, stones, feathers and so on. When we returned to our classroom, each group sat together and sorted their objects according to size, shape, colour and texture. We were experiencing nature and integrating it with numeracy.

Each group was then given a wire hanger and string. I told them to decide as a

group which eight objects they would like to choose to create a mobile. Elements of numeracy were involved in trying out different places on the hanger at which to tie objects in such a way that they would be balanced. After completing their task, each group got a chance to present their final product with the rest of the class, and to say why they had chosen those specific articles.

The left-over objects from each group were put into a box to be used for counting and sorting during further numeracy lessons.

This proved to be a most successful activity as I was integrating language, numeracy and lifeskills. The learners got the opportunity to work together on a creative task, make informed choices, and discuss and present their selections.

(from: Shelley Aronstam, Parklands College of Education.)

## 3 Group work in a geography lesson

'I wanted my Grade 5 Geography class to have practice in organising and presenting information, and translating it from pictures into language. I also wanted to give them an opportunity to work co-operatively.

I divided the class into groups of 4 or 5 learners, and gave each group a set of pictures relating to sheep or cattle farming (see next 3 pages). Each group was to work co-operatively to arrange the pictures in the right order, and to write a suitable label for each picture.

They pasted the pictures onto a sheet of cardboard. Each group then reported back to the class, describing their sequence of pictures. Other groups commented on different decisions they had made.

As a follow-up activity, each learner wrote a paragraph on the type of farming shown in her/his group's chart.'

(from: Belinda van de Griendt. 1997. Unpublished paper submitted for Diteme tsa thuto course)





#### 4. Group work in Grade R numeracy

I overheard Thandiwe, Ayanda, and Sipho arguing about who could hold more beads in their hands, and decided to turn this into a maths activity. I set out a number of different things in large margarine containers: pieces of cotton wool, beads, empty match boxes, domino pieces, marbles.

I then asked the three children, along with two others, to join me in a group activity. I said, 'I heard Thandiwe, Ayanda and Sipho talking about how many beads they could hold in their hands. I thought it would be interesting to find out how many different things you can hold in your hands. We can start with the beads. Everyone can reach in and take a big handful.'

When I had given them time to do this, I said, 'Put the beads you've picked up in front of you. Does anyone have an idea of how we can find out who has the most beads?'

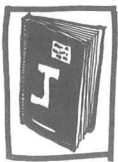
Ayanda shouted, 'We can count them!' She had already started to count her beads, and the other children started

to count theirs. I noticed that when Ayanda had finished counting her beads, she helped Sipho count his.

Later we used the same approach to see who could hold the most match boxes and other items in their hands. I used this activity for several clusters of children over the next few days. While one group was busy with this, the other children were busy in the book corner, dress-up corner, and so on.

The following week, I extended the activity. I suggested that the learners (again in one small cluster at a time) try tracing around their hands with crayons on paper. The idea was that they would then draw, on top of their hand drawings, what they had been holding. As I thought, the children found this a bit difficult. This gave me the chance to show them how easy it was if each child drew around another child's hand. In this way they saw how helpful it could be to co-operate to achieve a task.

(from: Shelley Aronstam, Parklands College of Education)



##### Activity 2.1 - Identifying the purpose of group work

Why do you think each of the four teachers whose work is described in the reading chose to use group work for presenting their particular lesson or activity? The first answer has been done for you. If you disagree with this answer, write your own answer. Then write your answer for the other 3 lessons described in the reading in your journal.

###### 1. The religious studies lesson

*The teacher wanted all the learners to participate actively, and experience for themselves the characters and conflicts of the story. She also needed a way of dealing with a very long story. By dividing it up and giving each group a section to deal with, it became more manageable.*

## Reasons for using group work



### 2.1 Helping learners learn more effectively

If you decide to use group work in a particular lesson, it should be because you believe that your learners will learn better in a small group. You have already started looking at what we know about learning in the strand of this course called ***Learning about Learning***. In making a decision about how to organise your class, you need to think carefully about how learners learn.

Learning is a very active process, and learners develop a “*theory of the world in their heads*” as they solve problems which are connected with what they already know. They learn particularly well when they are working together with others who know a little more than they do. They learn through talking about what they are doing, through explaining their point of view to others, and through debating which way is best to solve a problem.

By looking at how four teachers used group work in their classrooms, you have found out for yourself some of the reasons for using group work. Compare your answers and our ideas. (Remember, you might have thought of something that we have left out!)

#### 2.1 a. Increased participation and involvement

Group work usually gives more of the learners in your class a chance to take part actively, and to talk, than is the case with whole-class work. This means that it gives them more chance to *make sense of the world* for themselves.

- The religious studies teacher let every learner become one of the characters. This meant they could become personally involved in the difficulties, or dilemmas, that the characters were experiencing; in other words they could understand the story from the inside.
- The Grade 1 teacher created an activity in which every learner would be involved in creative thinking, choosing, constructing, making decisions about construction based on proportionality (balancing the objects), and presentation. Every one of these integrated activities would have involved a great deal of purposeful talk and discussion.
- The geography teacher gave *all* the learners a chance to be involved in ordering the information. Each could discuss the right order for the pictures and present his or her point of view. The learners could therefore make much better sense of the topic through being active.



- The Grade R teacher looks for opportunities to promote children's learning in ways that build on their own interests and play. Here she encourages the learners to test their claims (by providing things to pick up and hold, and by asking how they can find out who can hold the most). This creates the opportunity for co-operation. When the children do co-operate, they do so spontaneously, not because co-operation is a requirement set by the teacher. The children are not consciously working towards any joint solution, but they are working together on a common idea.

### **2.1 b. Working co-operatively**

In a group, every learner can be personally involved, and every learner can also interact with other learners. For every point which is discussed, some learners will know more than others, and different learners will have different ideas. This also helps learners to make sense of the world.

Group work also teaches learners how to work together as a team. This means that:

- they learn to deal with disagreement,
- they learn to accept that people have different views,
- they learn to respect each other's strengths and weaknesses,
- some of them learn to exercise leadership,
- they learn that each has special talents and skills,
- they can learn to co-operate and share ideas in order to produce a better result.

In groups, learners find that each has something to learn from the other. Each can use her or his special abilities to help those who have different abilities. When a group is well run, learners help one another, gaining confidence and skill, and building self-reliance and a sense of responsibility.

This frees you, the teacher, to deal with other issues, or to help specific individuals

All of the above increases a sense of community, and encourages working together towards a common goal, rather than competing as individuals. This is good training for democracy. It can be especially helpful in classes where there are tensions because of differences among the learners. (For example, there are sometimes tensions in a class where the children come from different language groups.)

In the lessons described above:

- The Grade 7 religious studies learners co-operated to produce a play. Each discovered and used specific talents and skills: musical, dramatic, leadership, organisation, etc.
- The Grade 9 s were spurred by inter-group competition to co-operate *within* their groups to perform a task well.
- The Grade 5 s co-operated to produce a sequence of pictures and information.
- In the lesson on civics, the learners co-operated to clarify concepts and reach conclusions about democracy.

### **2.1 c. Allowing for individual differences**

In group work, learners do not all have to move at the same pace on the same task. Learners can work at their own pace, and teachers can go round from group to group, helping groups or individuals with certain aspects of the task. Teachers can also set up a number of different kinds of task to suit individual needs and abilities. For example, a teacher might give one task to learners who enjoy drawing and another to learners who enjoy writing, while learners who are good at speaking might prepare and present a role-play.

Each learner will make meaning for him or herself out of the task in a different way, and in his or her own time.

In Reading 2.2 on the next page, you will read about a teacher using ability-based groups in a maths lesson in a way that helps her to spend more time with slower learners while the others learn to work independently at their own pace. This shows that ability grouping can occasionally be useful, so long as it is not allowed to become the norm in any one learning area. If it does become the norm, an unhealthy situation will quickly develop in which some learners begin to see themselves as superior while others identify themselves as inferior.

### **2.2 Access to resources**

Scarce resources can be made to go further by grouping learners, and further still by allowing groups to use the resources in turn. Now read about three more lessons where teachers made use of groups.



## READING 2: MAKING SCARCE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

### 1. A natural science lesson

'I wanted all my learners to have hands-on experience with a number of experiments relating to Digestion. However, I did not have enough equipment for each learner to do the experiment at the same time. There was not even enough equipment for several groups to do the experiment at the same time.

I set out 6 different experiments around the room, and divided the learners into 6 groups. Members in each group were given different roles, **and**

different parts of the experiment to do. Each group completed one experiment, and then passed on to the next. If they had to wait between completing one experiment and starting the next, they wrote up results and conclusions from completed work. One member wrote the experiment up, while the others helped decide what she should write.'

See pages 28, 29 of this umthamo for an explanation of the different roles participants can play in group work.

(from: Kerry, T. and Sands, M. 1982. Handling Classroom Groups. MacMillan Education)



A natural science lesson

### 2. A mathematics lesson

'I found that for certain sections of the maths syllabus, there were not enough examples in the text-book to give learners the practice that they needed. I made sets of work cards, on which I wrote extra examples which I got from other text books and from my own head. There were eight copies of each work card.

Once I had taught the learners a spe-

cific section, and they had done the examples in the text book, I would have a lesson in which they worked on their own on the work cards.

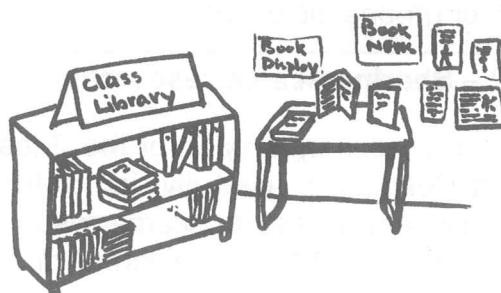
The class would divide into groups of 8. (They all knew which group they belonged to; I had divided them according to their maths ability). The group leader would fetch a set of work cards and hand them out to the learners in



that group. Once all the members of the group had finished the work card, the leader would go and fetch an answer card. He/she would read out the answers to the group and they would mark their work. They would then move on to another set of cards.

I would take the opportunity to go round from one learner to another, concentrating particularly on those who seemed to be finding the problems difficult. Learners who had got the answers to the problems on the work card wrong, could ask me for help.'

### 3. A reading lesson



'My Grade 4 class has a class library, which has sets of reading books in it. There are 8 copies of each book, and discussion questions have been pasted into the back of each book. Many of the books contain a number of short stories, and questions have been set on each story.

When we have a reading lesson, the class divides into groups. At the beginning of the year, these groups are formed on the basis of their reading ability. (Later, when everybody's reading has improved, I may re-group them into mixed ability groups.) Each group is given a set of readers. Some days, I

ask them to read aloud, in turns, to the group; on other days, I ask them to read silently to themselves. When a group has finished a story, they discuss the questions which have been set on that story. I will sometimes ask them to write down some of the answers in their exercise books once the discussion is over.

While the groups are reading, I spend some time going from group to group, assessing their progress. I will sometimes join a group that is struggling, and let them read aloud while I assist them with areas where they are having difficulty.'

## Multigrade teaching

In some schools, *teachers* are very scarce resources. Some teachers have to teach a number of grades at the same time. We call this multigrade teaching. They cannot treat the whole class as one group. They have to attend to the learners in one grade, while other learners have to work on their own. Group work can be used in such classes. After a short introduction and instructions, the learners can be divided into groups and work independently. The teacher can then give her attention to another grade. She still needs to keep an eye on the other groups, however.



### Activity 2.2 – Sharing scarce resources

1. How has the teacher, in each of the 3 lessons described in Reading 2, used division of the class to give the learners access to scarce resources? Discuss your ideas about this with a partner or your group.
2. In which of the 3 lessons are the learners really engaged in **group work**? Which lessons involve the learners in **individual work**, even though they are divided into groups? Discuss your ideas with a friend.



True group work contrasted with individual work in groups

You have probably realised that the Maths lesson (Reading 2.2) was not really a group work lesson, even though the learners were divided into groups. The learners were still working on their own, not co-operatively. We are not saying that there is anything wrong with this; a teacher can help learners learn by giving them access to scarce resources, whether they are working on their own or in groups. Working independently can also help learning in very specific ways.

However, it is important to realise that the key characteristic of true group work is **interaction**. If you want learners to feel the *special benefits* of working in a group, you need to set up an *interactive* task.

### Setting up an interactive task

Types of activity which take advantage of the interactive and co-operative features of group work are tasks which involve and encourage one of the following:

- Discussion
- Problem-solving
- Drama and other creative projects where the pooling of 'bright ideas' can help
- Field-work
- Experiments
- Project work

In an interactive task, group members work together co-operatively, each one making a contribution of her or his own towards the completion of the group's task.

Below are some examples of tasks where every group member has something to contribute, or where each member goes and finds something out which he or she later contributes to the group task.

This can work even more powerfully if the task is structured in such a way that all of the individual contributions are crucial to the successful completion of the group's task. The story-telling/essay-writing task below is an example of this. A more complex but very effective example is the 'jigsaw' type of activity (see Unit 3.1).

### **1. Story-telling/ Essay-writing**

Each member of the small group has a different picture. The group task is to put the pictures together in the correct order to form a story. Before they put them in order, each group member describes her/his picture. (A similar task could be given using sentences or paragraphs, instead of pictures. In this case, members would read their sentences/paragraphs before the group puts them in order.)

### **2. History**

Put learners into groups to dramatise a historical event they have learnt about. Each learner takes a different part. One learner could direct the dramatisation.

### **3. Structured discussions**

One way of ensuring that each group member has a contribution to make is to give them roles, as described later (Unit 3.5), e.g. chairperson, scribe, reporter. The chairperson has the specific role of ensuring that everyone contributes to the discussion.



#### 4. Sharing about lifestyle and culture

Each member tells others in the small group about an aspect of her or his lifestyle, e.g. weddings, funerals, or how their mothers cook pumpkin. They can also share experiences around a theme, e.g. crime, herding cattle, or adventures with neighbours. These sharings can be built into stories, essays, theme presentations, posters, drawings, etc.

#### 5. Researching local history

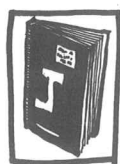
Each learner can go home and try to find out something about the history of his or her village, town or area by talking to older people. Back in class, each learner tells the small group about his or her findings, and these findings are put together to form a history.



##### Activity 2.3 – Ensuring that *everyone* participates

Look at all the examples in **Reading 1** and **Reading 2** with a partner or small group, and see what the teacher did, in each case, *to ensure that every group member had something to contribute*. In some cases, the teacher may not have done this. This would mean that some learners may not have been fully involved in the learning process.

Write a brief note in your journal about a few of the methods that interested you the most.



##### Activity 2.4 – The limitations of group work

1. So far, in this section, we have been talking about the advantages of group work. What do you think are the *limitations* of group work? Discuss them with your colleagues.
2. Can you think of ways to overcome some of these difficulties? (Discuss this with colleagues at school, and bring your ideas to your face-to-face group.)

## Limitations of group work

Here are some of the limitations of group work that we thought of: Perhaps you can add more.

- If group work is to be effective, it requires careful preparation on the part of the teacher. Common causes of failed group activities are:
  - when the group task is unstructured (for instance, when the teacher simply asks the class to Discuss such and such a topic in groups )
  - when the learners are not given very clear about instructions,
  - when the teacher is scratching around for materials that are needed by the groups to complete the activity, and is thus unable to move around, monitor and assist individuals and groups,
- Group work is less suitable when the teacher needs to explain a new concept and when it is important that the whole class should grasp this concept at more or less the same time.
- Sometimes learners need to grapple with a problem or set of problems on their own, or to reflect on an issue by themselves. Under such circumstances, group work would not be appropriate.
- .....
- .....
- .....



You should take about 4½ hours to complete this unit

## Unit 3 – HOW to use groups

### 3.1 Ways to use groups

What you have read so far seems to show that there are 3 basic ways to use groups. Of course, you might think of another way of using groups, and that is fine. Here are the 3 ways that we have thought of:

1. All the groups work on the *same* task, problem, or set of questions to discuss. When they have had enough time to complete the task, a spokesperson from each group reports back to the whole class (e.g. the language lesson, the geography lesson, the democracy lesson).
2. Each group works on *different* aspects of the same task or topic. Once they have had enough time to complete their section of the task, the findings are combined, or one group teaches the others about one aspect of the topic (e.g. the religious studies lesson).
3. Groups work in turn on *different tasks*. Eventually all have a turn at each task (e.g. the natural sciences lesson, the maths lesson and the reading lesson).

#### Jigsaw co-operative group activity

This method combines elements of types 1 and 2 above. Here the groups all work on the same task or a similar task — one that can easily be divided into, say four or five different aspects. Each individual *group member* is given only one particular aspect of the given topic to research, or one particular aspect of the given problem to solve. For this reason, everyone *has* to participate.

The difficulty of some learners being unable to solve a problem or do research on their own is resolved in a very creative way in the jigsaw activity. First the facilitator gives the group members their different tasks, and makes sure that everyone understands what he or she has to do. Then the groups are *dissolved* and all the individual learners are told to re-form themselves into *new* groups. These new groups are based on the aspect that they have to research or the part of the problem that they have to solve.

The members of these new, temporary groups now work together to perform their particular sub-task. If this involves research, they will also help each other prepare how they will later present their findings when they go back as indi



viduals to their original groups. When they have completed their tasks, these temporary groups (called expert groups) dissolve so that the members can return to their original start-out groups. Now they present, one after another, the findings or solutions in which they have become experts to the rest of their original group. All the start-out groups listen to their different members filling in the pieces of the jigsaw at the same time. (They should talk fairly quietly because if there are six groups in the class, six learners will be talking at the same time.)

This method requires the teacher to be well-prepared with whatever information or materials will be needed by each of the various expert groups. Such activities can take place within a double school period or over several days, depending on the nature of the task. They tend to generate a lot of enthusiasm, and everyone has to participate to the full. Less confident learners gain confidence from collaborating on their particular task with the other members of their expert group, and from being able to present themselves as experts.

### **A 'jigsaw' activity in practice**

Mrs Mabece had participated in a jigsaw-type activity during a training workshop, and wanted to try out this method with her learners. Her opportunity came when she was asked by her principal to teach a unit on HIV/AIDS to each of the classes in Grade 9.

First she thought of visiting the local clinic to get pamphlets about the disease, but then she realised that she might waste time if she didn't start by planning carefully. So she sat down to think about her aims first, and then about what learning outcomes would be appropriate for the Grade 9s. When she had written these down, she found that the outcomes she had identified suggested a way of dividing the topic into different aspects. Her own knowledge (which she had gained from reading some pamphlets and articles in the newspaper) also helped her to divide up the topic.

The aspects she listed were:

- How the HI virus affects the human body
- How HIV/AIDS is transmitted
- How to prevent transmission of the virus
- How to care for people living with HIV/AIDS
- How HIV/AIDS affects our communities and society as a whole.

Now that she knew exactly what she needed, she visited the clinic and came back with a packet full of leaflets on different aspects of the disease. Then she planned carefully how she would conduct the lesson. This was when she realised that with only 5 aspects to explore, the expert groups would be rather big. This was because every start-out group would have to consist of only 5 members. There were more than 40 learners in most of the Grade 9 classes, so the expert groups would end up with 8 or 9 members each.

Then, going through the pamphlets, she noticed that there were a lot of statistics in some of them. Some were in the form of tables, and some in the form of bar graphs or other graphs. This provided her with another aspect for the learners to investigate and make sense of — simple statistics. Now there would be start-out groups of 6, and expert groups of 6 or 7, which would be more manageable.

Mrs Mabece began the lesson by asking the class as a whole what they knew about HIV/AIDS. Their responses showed that they knew quite a lot about the suffering of victims. Some of them had lost family members to the disease. But it was also clear that there was a lot of ignorance about HIV/AIDS. And many learners had picked up strange, and sometimes dangerous, ideas about the disease. So an information-gathering approach seemed a good idea.

Then she divided the class into groups of 6, and told them to choose names for their groups, while she gave out small cards numbered from 1 to 6 to each group. She then explained (and wrote on the board) exactly what the 1s would need to research, what the 2s had to do, etc.

Then Mrs Mabece told the learners to leave their groups and gather in the 6 places she had marked with pieces of paper on the wall, 1 to 6. Here they were each given a pile of leaflets, and told that they had 30 minutes to find out all they could about their particular aspect of the topic. They also had to help each other prepare how they would convey this information to the rest of their start-out group (or named group) when they returned to this group later.

Although they needed to work together in the expert groups, each individual needed to write down what her or his group discovered. This was because each individual would be need to present this information to his or her start-out group later on — unaided.

About 8 minutes before the half hour was over, Mrs Mabece warned the learners to prepare their mini-presentations .

The expert groups dissolved when their half hour was up, and the learners returned to their original named groups. Mrs Mabece told them to present their findings to their own groups in the order she had written on the board. They had four minutes each for their presentations, and she announced the time at the end of every four minutes.

As she moved around, joining one group after another, she was surprised to find how much the learners had taken in. One expert group had been so motivated (perhaps by the thought of becoming experts ), that they had extended Mrs Mabece's question about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted. They had also found some interesting information debunking popular assumptions about the disease, so they included How HIV/AIDS is **not** transmitted in their findings. Mrs Mabece praised them for their critical thinking.

The lesson was so successful (without Mrs Mabece doing any lecturing) that she invited the Principal to observe her lesson with the second Grade 9 class. The Principal warmly praised her efforts, and the following term she was invited to run the activity in two neighbouring schools.

### Activity centres

In multigrade classes, it can be very useful to set up activity centres, one for each subject, e.g. mathematics, science, language, social studies, etc. At each centre, learning materials and cards with group activities are available. When one of the grades in the class does group work, the teacher sends those learners to a specific centre, where they work. As the day goes on, the teacher sends different grades to different centres.



### Key Activity (Part 1)

At this stage, you need to make a start on your Key Activity. Most of the smaller activities which you will do from now on will help you directly with your preparation for the Key Activity. Write your answers to the following questions in a special section (of a few pages) that you set aside in your Journal for this Key Activity.

1. In the coming week, identify a lesson in which you will be able to use one of the group activities we have described in **Readings 1 and 2** (except Reading 2.2), or one of the **ideas for interactive group work** on pages 17, 18. This gives you 11 ideas to choose from. You should adapt one of these ideas to suit the class and learning area you are teaching. If you wish, the whole lesson can be based on group work. The groups should consist of between 4 and 8 learners.

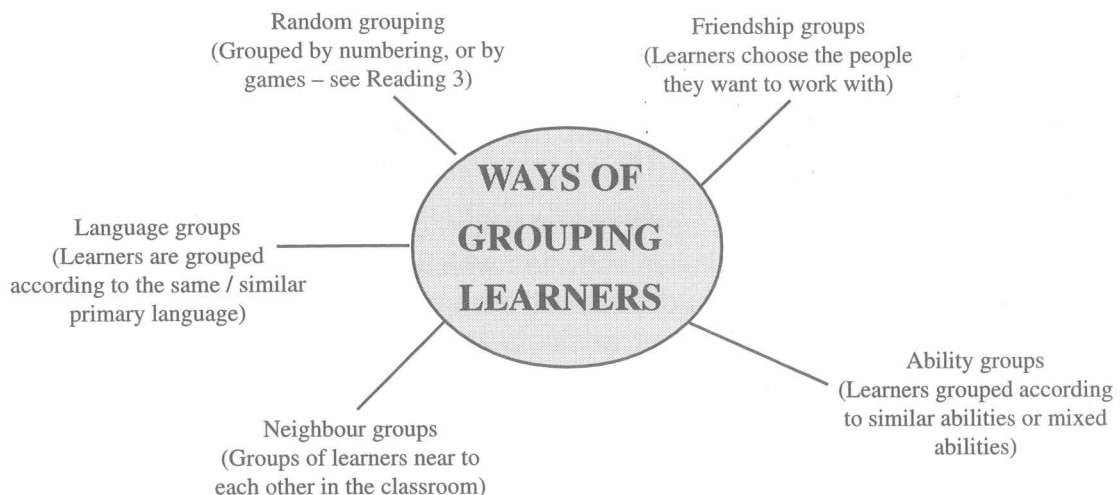
*Alternatively*, you could choose to plan a jigsaw activity along the lines of the activities described on pages 20 - 23

Describe the lesson and activity briefly in your journal.

2. Think about what you want your learners to know or be able to do by the end of the lesson or activity. These are the *learning outcomes* for the lesson or activity. Write them down.
3. Why do you want to use group work in this lesson or activity? In what ways will group work help the learners to achieve the learning outcomes more effectively? Write down your *reasons*.
4. How are you going to make sure that the task you set up is truly an *interactive task*? Describe the *interactive* task that you are planning.

### 3.2 Ways of grouping learners

The mind map below presents 5 ways of deciding which learners should go together in a group. Study the mind map carefully, and think about these ways that it suggests.







### Activity 3.2 – Grouping learners

1. Read Reading 3, at the end of this umthamo.
2. Discuss with a friend or colleague the advantages and disadvantages of the 5 ways of grouping learners given in the mind map.

For instance, letting friends work together could be good because the learners are used to one another and like one another. This means that they should be able to work together easily.

On the other hand, there are disadvantages to friendship groups. Because the friends are used to playing together, they may find it difficult to take the task seriously. In addition to that, if they always work with their friends, they won't get a chance to work with, and get to know, other people in the class.

Think about what could be good and bad about the other 4 ways of grouping learners.

3. Now decide how you will group the learners in your class for your **Key Activity**. Write down your decision in the **Key Activity** section you have created in your Journal, together with your reasons for your choice.



### 3.3 What size should small groups be?

Certain types of co-operative learning specifically require learners to work in pairs. For instance, teachers often employ pair work to get learners to practise the use of a second language. (Examples would be having a dialogue on a set topic, swapping stories, or using the target language to identify the details of a picture hidden from one's partner so that the partner can reproduce the picture.) In other cases, it is probably best to have groups of not more than 3 to 7 learners.



Smaller groups (3 or 4 learners) are easy to organise, because all you need to do is to put 2 double desks, or 2 pairs of learners, together (see photo on page 25). Smaller groups also allow for each learner to participate a lot, because there are fewer learners.



Bigger groups (7 or 8 learners), on the other hand, may be easier to monitor and manage because it means that there will be fewer groups in the classroom. However, you will need to move more furniture to get your groups in place. Another disadvantage of bigger groups is that there are usually a few learners who are left out of the activity in a group of 7 or 8.



A group of 5 or 6 might have some or all of the advantages mentioned above.



### **Activity 3.3 – Deciding on group size**

1. Talk to a friend or colleague about the disadvantages and advantages described above. See whether you agree with what has been written. Maybe you can think of other advantages or disadvantages of smaller and bigger groups.



2. How big will your groups be for your **Key Activity** lesson? Write down your decision in the **Key Activity** section of your Journal. Give your reasons for working with groups of that size.

If you have decided to use the jigsaw method for your Key Activity, think about what size you will need to make your start-out groups and expert groups, and write down your thoughts in the **Key Activity** section of your Journal.

For example, if there are 40 learners in your class, and the problem or research task you want to set can readily be divided into 4 aspects, you will need to organise 10 start-out groups of 4 members each. These will dissolve into 4 large expert groups with 10 learners in each. If these are too big to work on the research task or solve their aspect of a problem together, there is a solution. Simply break these larger groups into smaller groups of 5 each. This means that 2 expert groups will work on each aspect.



### 3.4 Should groups be permanent or flexible?

You may know teachers who organise their classes into permanent groups, i.e. whenever there is group work, the same learners work together. On the other hand, there are teachers who re-organise their classes into different groups every time they have a group activity.

#### Permanent groups

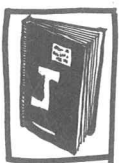
If your learners always work in the same groups, it is very easy for them to move into groups. They know how to move the furniture, and who they will work with. The learners also become used to one another, and this may make it easier for them to work together.

One disadvantage of permanent groups is that particular groups may get labelled. They may think of themselves as the stupid group or the clever group. Others may also think of them in these ways, and it is often difficult for a person from that group to change, or to see her/himself differently. Another disadvantage is that learners always interact with the same people, and never have a chance to find out about other people, or share ideas with them.

## Flexible groups

If you decide to let learners work in different groups every time you do group work, they will have the chance to work with a lot of different people. They will also find that in different groups they discover that they have different talents. In one group, for instance, Lulu might find that she is the leader, while in another group she has time to discover her acting talent, because a different person is taking the lead.

The disadvantage of changing your groupings on a regular basis is that it is more time-consuming. It takes time to put the learners into their new groups, and it takes time for them to get used to working together.



### Activity 3.4 – Permanent or flexible groups?

1. Talk to a friend or colleague about the advantages and disadvantages of permanent and flexible groupings which are described above. Do you agree with what has been written? Maybe you can think of disadvantages and advantages which have not been mentioned here.
2. How would you like to work with your class in the future: with permanent or flexible groups, or with a combination? Write down your decision, and some reasons for it, in the **Key Activity** pages in your Journal. Explain whether the groups you use for your Key Activity will be the permanent groups in your class, or whether you will change them and use different groupings in the future.

If you have chosen to use the jigsaw method in your Key Activity, you need not write anything about this activity (3.4), since the question of permanent or flexible groups is not really relevant.



## 3.5 Organising learners within their groups

Many educators make the mistake of assuming that learners know how to work together in groups. They think that if they simply put learners into groups and set them a task, they will automatically learn. This is often a recipe for failure. While a minority of learners have a natural aptitude for co-operating with others, most need to be taught how to co-operate in



carrying out tasks effectively. Even those who already have a talent for group work can be helped to develop this talent further.

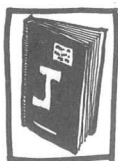
It is thus important that you should give your learners guidance as to how to organise themselves within the group, giving certain people specific roles. Here are some roles which might be needed in a group for particular purposes. Notice that one person can sometimes perform 2 or more roles.

There is the person:

- who makes sure that everyone contributes, in order to get the task done (a facilitator or chairperson);
- who writes down the decisions of the group (a secretary);
- who reports back to the whole class on the group's work (a spokesperson);
- who keeps track of the time (a time-keeper);
- who makes sure the group stays on the task.

If a group is called on to produce a short play, as the learners did in Reading 1.1, there would need to be someone:

- who directs a play;
- who is in charge of music;
- who looks after the costumes and the props;
- etc., etc.



### Activity 3.5 – Giving learners specific roles

1. Discuss with a colleague the roles that would be needed in the group work activity in the Language lesson described in Reading 1.2. Choose from the list above and add your own ideas.
2. Decide which roles will be needed in the groups which you will set up for your **Key Activity**. Make notes about these roles in the **Key Activity** section of your Journal. Explain why you think that these roles will be necessary. Say whether you will appoint learners for the different roles, or whether you will allow them to choose learners for each of the roles. (You may, of course, decide that it is not necessary to have special roles in your groups.)

If you have chosen to use the jigsaw method in your Key Activity, you may need to think about introducing the idea of specific roles in the expert groups.



07:00



## Unit 4 – WHAT SKILLS do I require for group work?

### Key Activity (Part 2)

You have decided on an activity or lesson in which you will use group work, and you have made notes on a number of aspects of the lesson.

1. **Before you give the lesson**, use your notes to write a plan for the activity or lesson under the headings suggested below.



### PLAN

1. **Title of lesson or task**
2. **Grade and class**
3. **Outcomes:** What do you want your learners to be able to do by the end of the activity/ lesson?
4. **Reasons:** Why are you using group work?
5. **Stages:** Describe the stages of the activity/ lesson.
6. **Grouping the class:**
  - a) How will you divide the class into groups? Why?
  - b) What size will the groups be? Why?
  - c) Will these groupings remain permanent for future lessons, or do you intend to change them? Why?  
(Since two kinds of groups are used in the 'jigsaw' activity, this question is not relevant if you have chosen to use this sort of activity.)
7. **Classroom arrangement:** Make a drawing of the way you arranged the desks in your classroom.
8. **Interactive task:** How will you make sure that each group member has something to contribute to the completion of the task, and that they work co-operatively?  
(If you chose to use the 'jigsaw' method, you need not answer this question, since co-operation and full participation are the main reasons for choosing it.)
9. **Roles:** What roles will be given to learners within each group? Will you assign the roles, or will group members choose?  
(If you chose the 'jigsaw' method, this question would probably apply only to the 'expert' groups.)



### Key Activity (Part 2 Continued)

2. Conduct the lesson involving group work.
3. **After you have given the lesson**, think about it, and answer the questions below under the heading Thinking about my lesson . Write these answers in your journal in the **Key Activity** section you have created.
4. Also write about the *feelings* you experienced before and after the lesson.



### THINKING ABOUT MY LESSON

1. **Outcomes:** Did the learners achieve the outcomes? How do you know?
2. **Reasons:** Would you use group work again for this kind of activity? Why?/ Why not?
3. **Stages:**
  - a) What went well? Why?
  - b) What didn't go well? Why?
  - c) What would you change if you gave this lesson again?
4. **Grouping the class:**

Did you find this a good way of grouping the class? Why? How would you group the class if you gave this lesson again?

  - b) Do you think that the size of the groups was right? Why?/ Why not?
  - c) Have you changed your mind about permanent/ flexible grouping? Why?/ Why not?
5. **Classroom arrangement:** Did you arrange the classroom as you had planned? Draw a diagram of the way you arranged the classroom, if it was different from the way you had planned. Why did you change your plan/ Why not? How would you arrange the classroom if you gave this lesson again?
6. **Interactive task:** Was each learner actively involved in the group activity? Give some examples of what they were all busy with.

7. **Roles:** Was it helpful for specific learners to have roles within each group? Why?/ Why not? What will you do next time?

8. **My skills:**

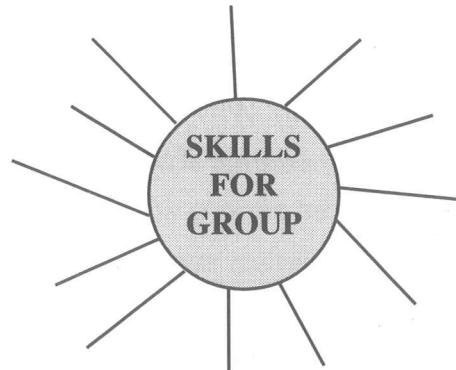
What did you cope well with?

b) When did you feel you needed more skill? Why?  
What skills did you need?



#### Activity 4.2 – What skills are needed to use group work?

1. Now that you have completed your key activity, discuss in your concluding face-to-face session what skills a teacher needs in order to use group work effectively.
2. Copy the mind map below into the **Key Activity** section of your Journal, and write down all the ideas you can think of on it. (Add as many branches as you need.)



3. What skills did **you need** in your Key Activity lesson or activity? Make notes about those skills which you have, and are comfortable using. Also make notes about the skills which you think you still need to develop.
4. Here are our ideas of some of the skills that a teacher requires for successful group work. Read them, and compare our ideas with yours.
  - planning ahead
  - giving clear instructions to learners
  - motivating, inspiring and encouraging learners to co-operate
  - organising the learners into groups

- organising changes from one stage of the lesson to another
- maintaining focus on the task
- dealing with restless or disruptive group members
- watching the interactions of learners in the groups
- checking on progress
- intervening to deal with problems, or to help where learners are unsure what to do
- questioning
- summarising and reinforcing what has been learned
- organising homework, follow-up and packing up.

### **Activity 4.3**

Look at the outcomes stated at the very beginning of this umthamo (they are re-printed below). Do you think you have achieved these outcomes? On a piece of paper, answer Yes or No , and give a reason for your answer if you need to. Remember to head the paper, and to add it to the other pages in your concertina file.

Can you:

- Plan an activity involving small group work?
- Organise and implement the activity?
- Critically evaluate what happened and why it happened?



## Conclusion

In this umthamo we have looked at how different classroom management patterns can support or hinder effective learning. We focused on planning, organising and using small groups to promote increased participation and co-operation among learners.

Teachers often feel that group work is noisy and disorganised, and that no real learning takes place when they divide learners into groups. We hope that this umthamo helped you to design an interactive task with a clear purpose, so that each learner had a role to play in her or his group, and was actively involved in the learning process. We hope that you were able to use some of the ideas on how to group your learners, and that you felt that your skills in handling group work were developing. Above all, we hope that you enjoyed the group work lesson that you organised!

We look forward to hearing about your lessons in the face-to-face sessions, and from your abaKhwezeli.

Later imithamo in this strand will take you deeper into the concept of learner-centredness, and give you a chance to explore ways of using the learner's world as a resource for learning.



### Reading 3: WAYS OF GROUPING LEARNERS

#### **Fighting the territorial imperative: some ideas for allocating groups and pairs**

This reading consists of extracts from an article which appeared in *Modern English Teacher* (Volume 10, Number 4, Summer 1983). It is written by a teacher of English to adults and gives ideas on different ways of forming groups in the classroom.

Recent years have seen much discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of pair work and group work in the language class. Whilst many teachers of traditional frame of mind undoubtedly still need convincing, it is probably true to say that for the majority of teachers today, especially of adults, pair and group practice have become part of

their established methodology. Nevertheless, even the most convinced and enthusiastic teachers will encounter problems with organising pairs and groups. This article concentrates on one such problem - getting the students into pairs or groups before they actually start on the task.

## Neighbours

The most common strategy for allocating pairs or groups is to ask the students to work with their immediate neighbours in the class. The advantages of this procedure are speed, ease and minimal 'disruption' of the class; one or two students may have to move, but most will stay in the same place. The disadvantage is that students have a limited number of immediate neighbours (two with a horseshoe or similar seating arrangement, three or four with groups of tables), so there are a limited number of other students with whom they will come into contact. As students tend to sit in the same place every week this disadvantage becomes more apparent the longer the course goes on. Indeed, considerable problems may arise - some students grow to resent always having to work with a person they don't much like or who is much 'better' or 'worse' than they are, others form cliques and will not co-operate with other class members. Clearly this basic format needs variation: students must move so that they work with everyone else in the group.

## My students won't move

At this point a further problem arises: "My students don't like to move." It seems to be a fact of life that in any group of adults which meets regularly for any purpose whatever and sits down, the group members lay claim to their own seats ...

Quite basic feelings of security seem to be involved in this behaviour. For this reason it is not a good idea for the teacher simply to ask student A to go and work with B, C to work with D, etc. Whilst they may fully agree with the teacher that it is a good idea to talk to

other people in the class, most students in the position of A or C will feel imposed on when asked to move. Moreover, they will be performing the task 'away' while B and D enjoy home advantage. When teachers ask students to move like this, be it with all the charm and reasonableness they can muster, it is unlikely that they are helping students overcome their natural inhibitions. Actually they are beating them down by virtue of their authority: the student does not want to move but he wants even less to disappoint or disobey the teacher. It is better if the teacher can motivate the student in such a way that he can forget his misgivings. Partner-finding activities can help here.

## Find your partner

The procedure is as follows: give each student a small card with, say, a time of day on it (clock face or numbers). Tell the students that another member of the group has an identical card; they must find this person by asking questions. They are not allowed to show the card to the others or to shout out what is on it. When they have found the matching card they have found their partner for the next activity. The pair should then sit down together (preferably on the nearest two chairs). You will then tell them what they have to do, if you haven't told them already. The first time or two you do this make sure the students know they are looking for their partner for the next bit of work, otherwise some pairs will split again and go back where they came from. If the next phase involves the book, it is a good idea to have students take books, pens, etc. with them when they move. This encourages them to sit down and get on with it and means that the tables are less cluttered and not

obviously 'taken' - you want the whole classroom to become 'safe territory' for everybody.

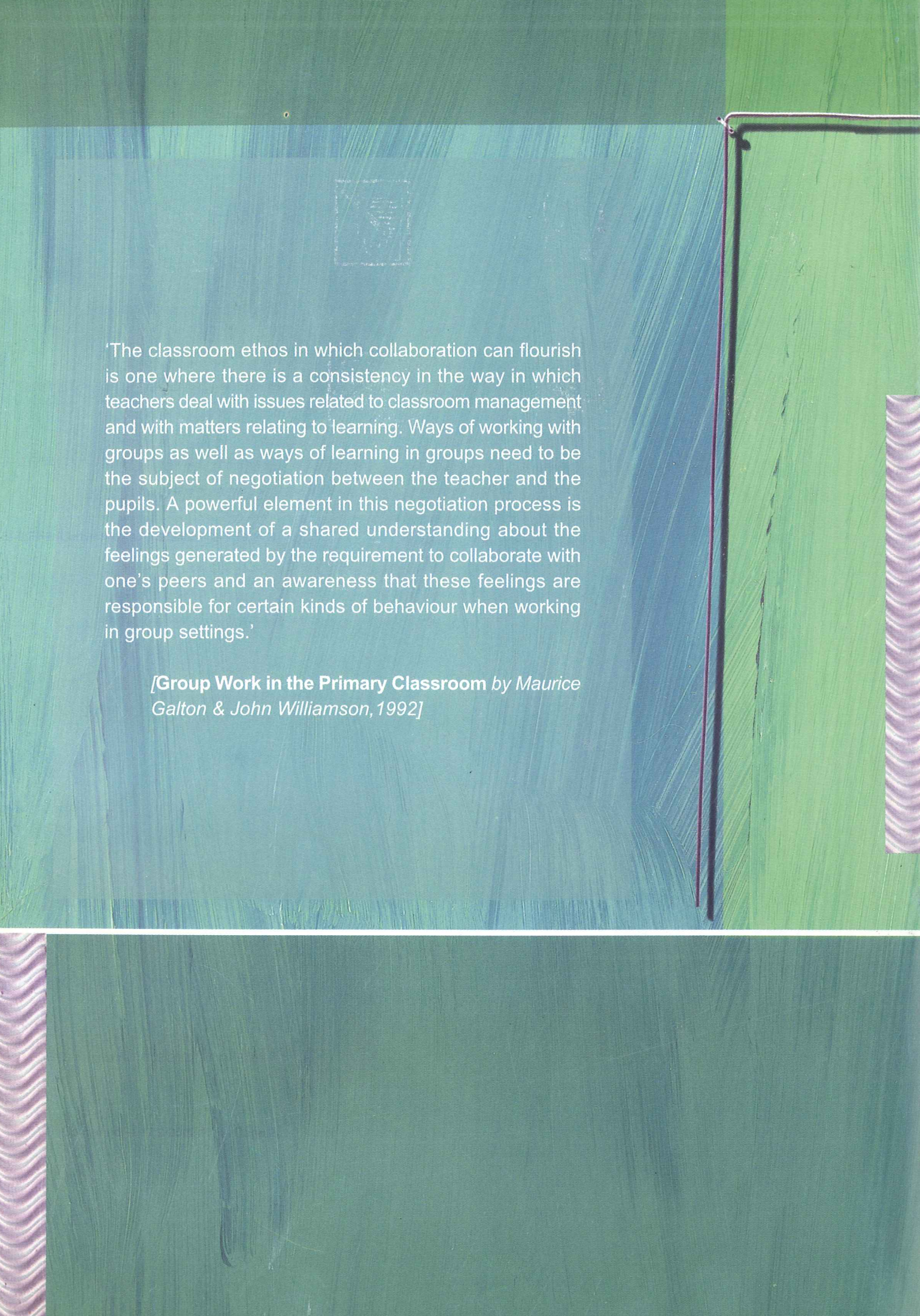
## **Allocating groups**

The same principles as for partner-finding can also be used for allocating groups ..... Once your class is used to moving around and working with different people in this way, it actually becomes much easier to allocate groups

and pairs by request. An easy way to allocate groups whilst ensuring that immediate neighbours are in different groups is to count students off 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - etc. round the class and to put all the 1's together, the 2's together and so on. After a break in the lesson you can simply ask students to go and work with someone they have not worked with for some time, or even to form their own groups.

(from: Bruce Pye *MET Volume 10 No 4 Summer 1983*)



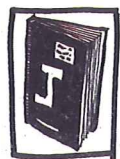


'The classroom ethos in which collaboration can flourish is one where there is a consistency in the way in which teachers deal with issues related to classroom management and with matters relating to learning. Ways of working with groups as well as ways of learning in groups need to be the subject of negotiation between the teacher and the pupils. A powerful element in this negotiation process is the development of a shared understanding about the feelings generated by the requirement to collaborate with one's peers and an awareness that these feelings are responsible for certain kinds of behaviour when working in group settings.'

**[Group Work in the Primary Classroom** by *Maurice Galton & John Williamson, 1992*]



## Icons used in the Imithamo



Journal



Thinking &  
Reflecting



Written  
Report



Classroom or  
School



Key Activity



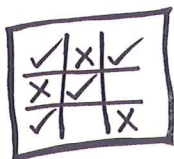
Face-to-Face  
Umkwezeli



Concertina File  
for Portfolio



Making  
Materials



Assessment



Discussion



Tape recorder



Reading and  
thinking



This unit  
should take  
you  
.... hours

Time



Gather Learners  
around You

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B.Ed. (Foundation & Intermediate Phase)

CORE EDUCATION STUDIES COURSE

Helping Learners Learn

## **Group Work**

First Pilot Edition - 2002

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