

SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS

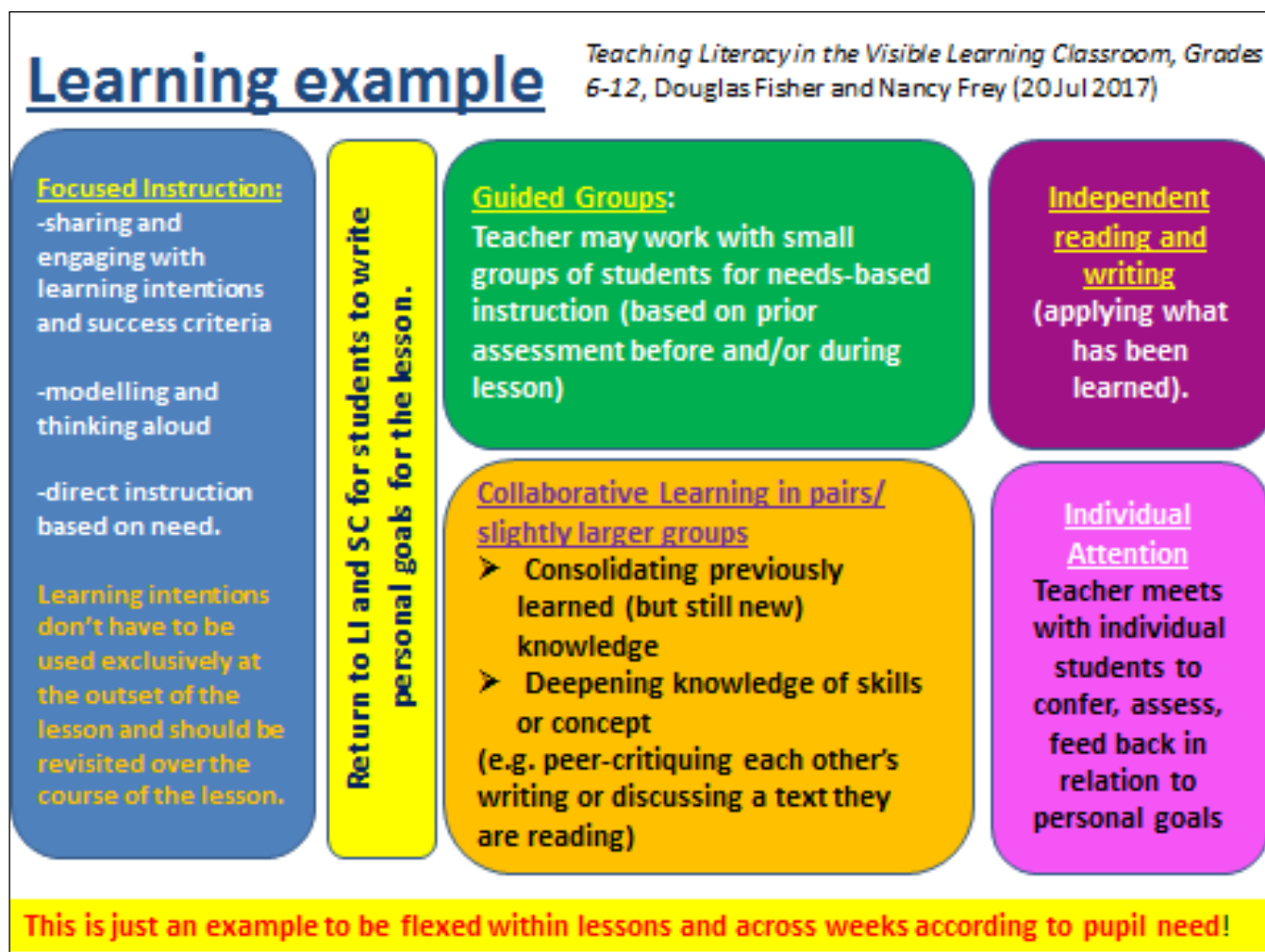
# Why Do Group Work?



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There is a strong evidence base to suggest that collaborative work supports pupils' learning, just as it does in the adult world. This is not to say that group work is more important than teacher instruction and independent work, but that it forms part of a balanced learning experience.

The following model from *Teaching Literacy in the Visible Learning Classroom, Grades 6-12* (Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey) shows how a balance of direct instruction, collaborative practice and independent practice and application can work. If the middle area of guided and collaborative work is missed, pupils have little opportunity to practise and reflect on their learning with others, talking through thinking and exploring ideas. Group discussion is also an opportunity for teachers to hear pupils' thought processes, assess pupils' learning and respond accordingly.

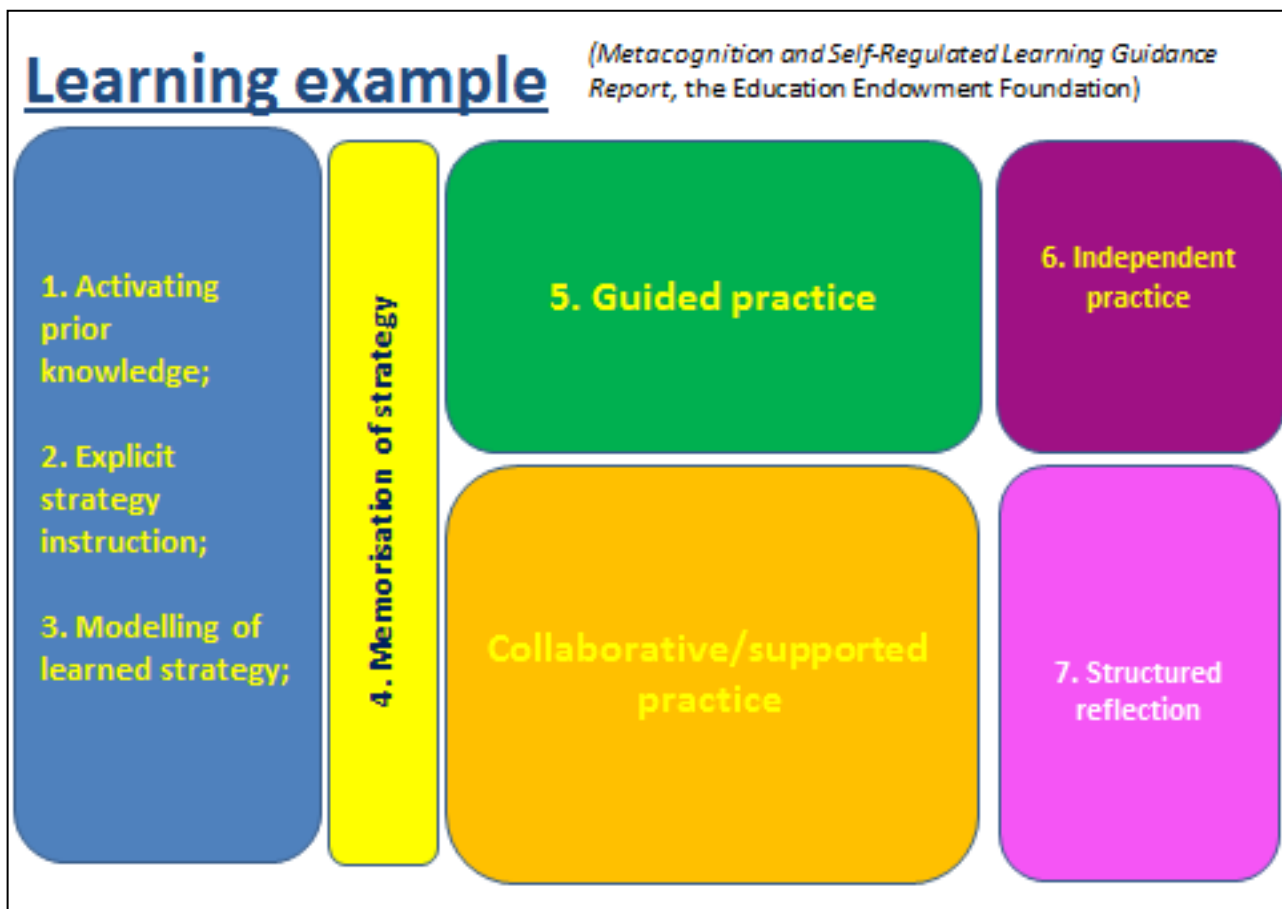


In the *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning Guidance Report*, the Education Endowment Foundation provides the following seven steps to explicitly teaching metacognitive strategies:

1. *Activating prior knowledge;*
2. *Explicit strategy instruction;*
3. *Modelling of learned strategy;*
4. *Memorisation of strategy;*
5. *Guided practice;*
6. *Independent practice; and*
7. *Structured reflection.*

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/metacognition-and-self-regulated-learning/>

These seven steps also exemplify the model of balanced practice described by Fisher and Frey



## Food for Thought:

***'Learning is social in nature and springs from the interactions we have with others (Halliday, 1975). Therefore, an important role of the teacher is to foster questions and dialogue among pupils and create meaningful experiences that allow them to interact with one another.'*** - *Teaching Literacy in the Visible Learning Classroom, Grades 6-12*, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (20 Jul 2017)

***'For children to become more able in using language as a tool for both solitary and collective thinking, they need involvement in thoughtful and reasoned dialogue, in which conversational partners 'model' useful language strategies and in which they can practise using language to reason, reflect, enquire and explain their thinking to other'*** - Neil Mercer

[http://oer.educ.cam.ac.uk/wiki/The\\_educational\\_value\\_of\\_dialogic\\_talk\\_in\\_whole-class\\_dialogue](http://oer.educ.cam.ac.uk/wiki/The_educational_value_of_dialogic_talk_in_whole-class_dialogue)

***Research over a 40-year period demonstrates that the impact of collaborative approaches to learning is consistently positive and enhances attainment. This extensive body of research also indicates that approaches that promote talk and interaction between learners tend to result in the most gains.'***

*Miseducation*, Diane Raey

***'Let's consider increasing classroom discourse (synonymous with classroom discussion or dialogue). Students would be invited to talk with their peers in collaborative groups, working to solve complex and rich tasks. The students would not be ability grouped, but rather grouped by the teacher intentionally to ensure that there is academic diversity in each group as well as language support and varying degrees of interest and motivation.'***

***The effect size of classroom discourse is 0.82, well above our threshold, and likely to result in two years of learning gains for a year of schooling.'*** -

*Teaching Literacy in the Visible Learning Classroom, Grades 6-12*, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (20 Jul 2017)

***A study published in July 2017 found that students benefitted from activities involving dialogic talk, where pupils were required to provide extended explanations to questions and discussion topics, developing talk beyond responses to closed questions. The approach improved English outcomes for all students, including those eligible for free school meals (Jay et al, 2017 [8]).***

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-literacy-at-the-transition-a-research-summary-for-teachers/>

## How to do Group Work Effectively

Research and our own experience tell us that collaborative learning is not always productive. It is easy for some pupils to lose focus, opt out or disrupt the learning of others. Neil Mercer comments that, *'It is not enough to allow pupils the opportunity for discussion while they carry out educational activities. If simply left to their own devices, their talk is often not productive; some children will be excluded from discussions and the potential value of collaborative learning is squandered.'* (*The Value of Exploratory Talk.*)

So what can we do?

- 1) Be clear about what you are using discussion for. For example:
  - Are you using discussion to consolidate content/strategies previously delivered through direct instruction?
  - Are you using discussion to generate ideas that will contribute to wider class feedback?
- 2) How might the reason for discussion change the format/structure of the group work that you use?
- 3) Ensure the reason for the group task is clear to everyone - what are we learning?
- 4) Make it clear to the pupils that some lessons/parts of lessons are explicitly intended to be discussion sessions – talk is part of our learning, and we need to learn to talk and listen effectively. Consider how you will hold pupils accountable for their learning e.g. are you expecting group consensus and a collaboratively written response? Will pupils be expected use ideas from group work in their independent work? Will pupils be given key roles?
- 5) Develop a class environment conducive to talk e.g. table arrangement, volume etc
- 6) Develop agreed ground rules for different types of talk
- 7) During group work, monitor and assess progress in learning. Take time to observe before jumping in. Try to avoid giving the right answer/taking over the conversation, but intervene and support as necessary.
- 8) Ask pupils to reflect on how they have worked together (what went well in our group... when our group didn't work...) and the learning process (what just happened to your thinking?)
- 9) Make the learning that has happened through talk visible by capturing outcomes.
- 10) Analyse and evaluate effectiveness of classroom talk (teacher notes, fishbowl observation/recorded talk/transcripts) and adapt practice.

The Education Endowment Foundation also comment on the need for structure and effective conditions as part of developing metacognitive skills: *‘Common teaching strategies to better organise and structure classroom talk and dialogue include ‘Socratic talk’, ‘talk partners’ and ‘debating’ (each strategy having its own clear parameters and rules for responsible dialogue). Such strategies - provided they are sufficiently challenging, build on firm pupil subject knowledge, are realistic, and suitably guided and supported by the teacher - can help develop self-regulation and metacognition. We should take care, however, not to focus on dialogue simply as an end in itself without it being wedded to these necessary conditions.’ – Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning: Guidance Report.*

Like any other learning activity, the decision to use group work needs to be based on the learning needs. The following questions may prove useful:

- 1) Why is group work an appropriate task at this point in learning? How will I share this understanding with pupils?
- 2) What will pupils learn? How will they learn it? How will I know?
- 3) What structure of group work is most appropriate for the key learning?
- 4) How will I ensure the conditions and environment enable effective talk?
- 5) How will we establish ground rules?
- 6) How will I ensure all pupils are engaged in group work? How will they be held accountable?

## Possible Approaches to Group Work

A balance of whole class, group, paired work and independent work form part of a balanced curriculum. The summaries below aim to support teachers in choosing from a range of possible group work structures and activities to meet pupils' needs and key learning. This is not a definitive list.

### Jigsaw Grouping

**Key Learning:** cooperating with peers, teaching others, effective listening and note taking

#### Why use?

- Pupils sharing research and ideas, learning from one another
- Breadth of coverage
- Shared accountability with clear outcomes for all pupils

Divide a topic up into sub-topics or different key questions that require pupils to analyse the same materials from a different point of view.

Divide pupils into groups, each with a key area of focus, providing time for task (can be homework)

Pupils form new groups. Each new group is a 'jigsaw', with one pupil from each of the original groups. Each group now has one 'expert' in each area.

The new group now completes an activity that requires them to peer teach and cooperate with the rest of the group over a combined task that requires them to integrate the different focus areas.

### Opinion Stations

**Key Learning:** critical thinking, listening to others to inform own opinions and to understand differing views

#### Why use?

Opinion stations can assist pupils in determining where they stand on an issue, and then in listening closely to the positions of others. Opinion Station activities should then be followed up with further discussion as a class, allowing pupils to change their opinions when persuaded by the arguments of others.

Post (i.e. four corners of the classroom) signs reading, respectively, "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree."

Pose an opinion question to the pupils and asks them to write independently for three minutes, listing reasons and evidence to support their claims, before choosing a station.

Pupils move to their corner of choice to discuss their opinions with their like-minded peers and to select and record ideas from the group. A spokesperson is selected.

Each group presents their ideas and the other groups ask clarifying questions and take notes.

Opinion stations again to see if views have shifted. Pupils write a response to the question.

Can be used to feedback on pupils' own writing, i.e. to support pupils in understanding how their characters/information/arguments etc have been interpreted by others and what readers feel are the most/least successful elements of writing.



## Pinwheel Discussions

**Key Learning:** effective questioning, and how discussion can be structured effectively

### Why use?

- Shared accountability across the group as all members of the group will feed back.
- Exploration of effective discussion structure
- Develops questioning skills through teacher modelling and support

Pupils are divided into four teams, with the purpose of comparing and contrasting previously read text.

- The first three teams address issues of content (e.g., three different poems)
- The fourth team are “the provocateurs.”

The three content teams meet to consolidate their knowledge of the topic/text (each group has a different topic/text)

As they prepare, the teacher meets separately with the provocateurs, whose job it will be to lead the questioning and discussion.

After the teams have prepared, the first group of four (one member representing each of the four teams) sits in the centre of the room. Each representative’s teammates sit just behind their representative. The discussion begins, led by the teacher and the provocateur.

After a prescribed period, the teams “pinwheel” as a new representative from each of the four teams takes the centre chair. This continues until all pupils have had a turn in the discussion.

The teacher poses questions when the provocateurs falter, revoicing and restating as needed when team representatives make a point that is in need of clarification.

In addition, the teacher keeps a tally on the board of the conversational moves of the participants, noting each time a pupil:

- makes a connection
- Proposes a new idea
- Poses a follow-up that propels the discussion.
- Uses textual evidence to support a position.

These active Visual reminders assist all the pupils in

## Fishbowl Discussion

**Key Learning:** developing ideas and responding to others, listening skills, effective note-taking

### Why use?

- Pupils develop their ideas and respond to others’ ideas in a formal context
- Pupils learn listening, note taking and observation skills
- The facilitator role offers the opportunity to give emphasis to listening, questioning and synthesis skills (useful for pupils who tend to dominate general discussion)

4-8 chairs are arranged in a group in the centre of the classroom – this is the ‘fishbowl’ where discussion between pupils takes place. Other chairs are arranged around these so that pupils sitting outside the group can see and hear the discussion.

The teacher (or a pupil who has prepared to take on this role) acts as the facilitator and sets out the topic or question(s) to be discussed.

Pupils in the fishbowl discuss the topic/question(s) for a set amount of time while those outside the fishbowl listen and take notes on the key ideas set out during the discussion as well as their own questions and/or responses.

Observers can be directed to take notes on the discussion as a whole or assigned a single participant to observe; in this case, the observer notes down everything their assigned participant says (and does) during the discussion. These notes can be used during follow-up work or further small-group discussion, either about the topic or metacognitive reflection about effective participation in discussion activities.

In an ‘open fishbowl’, one chair in the fishbowl is left free for any observer to join the discussion. When the empty chair is filled, one of the discussion group must leave their chair and go to sit among the observers so that there is always an empty space.

In a ‘closed fishbowl’ there is no empty chair and the discussion is time-limited. Once the time is up, all of the members of the discussion group leave their chairs and are replaced by new participants, who continue the discussion or are given a new aspect of the



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| <p>recognizing when valuable turns in the discussion take place, and signal to them when particular conversational moves are lacking.</p> <p>This activity works well as preparation for fishbowl discussions.</p>  | <p>topic/question(s) to discuss.</p> <p>At the end of the discussion or the changeover of fishbowl participants, the facilitator summarises the discussion and offers new points/questions to discuss or consider.</p>  |
| <p><b><u>Reciprocal Reading</u></b></p> <p><b>Key Learning:</b> (reading comprehension: skills of prediction/inference; questioning; clarifying; summarising)</p> <p><b>Why use?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adaptable model that can be used for any comprehension task</li> <li>- all pupils have clear roles and accountability</li> <li>- ideas are shared supporting joint understanding</li> <li>- teachers can easily assess pupils' understanding</li> <li>- once pupils are familiar with approach can be applied anywhere and skills will be taken into independent work</li> </ul> <p>Reciprocal reading is an approach to reading that focuses on jointly constructing the meaning of a text through dialogue, often in small groups with pupils taking on key roles. The four key roles are: predictor; questioner; clarifier; summariser</p> | <p><b><u>Quescussion</u></b></p> <p><b>Key Learning:</b> effective questioning</p> <p><b>Why use?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pupils who are reluctant to talk may be more willing to contribute a question than a statement</li> <li>- Encourages more experimental and creative thinking because questions are tentative</li> <li>- Shapes future discussion by identifying questions that open up richer and more profitable avenues to explore</li> <li>- Allows a large number of pupils to make brief contributions without interventions from the teacher</li> </ul> <p>Developed by Paul Bidwell at the University of Saskatchewan, Quescussions are usually short, around two to five minutes, and involve the class calling out questions, and only questions. Teacher sets out the subject (or in this case, text) to explore, and encourages pupils to raise any questions that will help them to analyse and gain a deeper understanding of the topic.</p> <p>The discussion can only contain questions (they can be asked without the need to raise hands)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A pupil who asks a question must wait until at least four other questions have been asked before asking another</li> <li>- The teacher may stop the Quescussion to help the pupils think about the type of questions they are asking. They may be encouraged to ask more open-ended questions e.g. Why? How?</li> <li>- If a statement is made instead of a question the whole class will shout STATEMENT! (Rhetorical questions that are thinly-veiled statements should also be policed by the class.)</li> <li>- Teacher takes on the role of scribe to record the questions. These can then be grouped and organised and presented back to the class for future discussion.</li> </ul> |

## Conversation roundtable

**Key Learning:** listening skills, effective note-taking and summary and synthesis of ideas

### Why use?

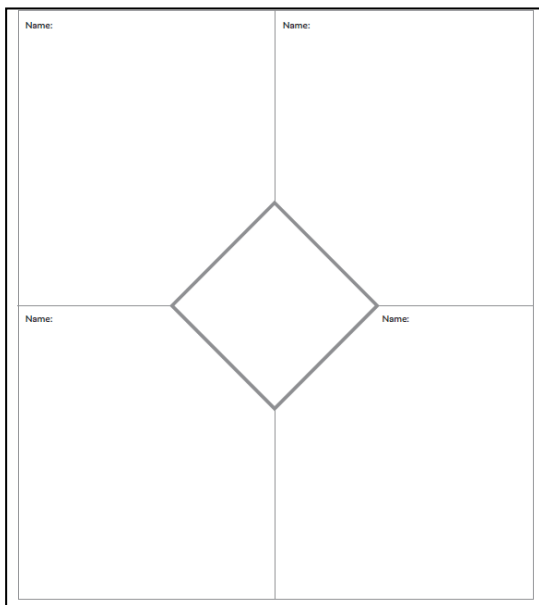
- Accountability is shared and all pupils need ideas before sharing as a group
- Outcome is clear with summative comments useful feedback to teacher and pupils
- Pupils learn listening, note taking and how to synthesise discussion outcomes concisely
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Pupils fold a piece of paper as below.

As pupils read a selected text, they take notes in the upper left quadrant of their own paper.

After the pupils have composed notes on their own paper, they each take a turn at discussing the text. As each pupil speaks, the listeners make notes about the content being shared, using the other three quadrants of the paper.

Now they turn their attention to the rhombus in the centre of the paper. Pupils independently write their own response in the centre. Depending on the task assigned by the teacher, they might be summarizing their understanding of the text, identifying the theme, or posing additional questions in the area in the centre. Responses should be influenced by the collaborative discussion.



## Snowballing

**Key Learning:** cooperating with peers, teaching others, effective listening, note taking, elaboration and synthesis of ideas

### Why use?

- Pupils share information and ideas cumulatively, absorbing and reformulating as they go
- Developing deeper understanding of complex information at a manageable pace
- Teaching the information given to others, particularly the connections between factual content or ideas, encourages deeper understanding and stronger recall

Ask a question that leads to what you want pupils to learn.

- each individual writes down their thoughts without reference to others
- pupils then share what they have written in pairs
- the pairs combine to create larger groups, comparing their answers and agreeing a group answer

### OR

Give pupils information about an idea/text/topic on small cards.

- pupils absorb and make their own notes on the information
- pupils explain to a partner what they have learned from their own card and listen to what their partner has learned from theirs
- both pupils discuss how the two pieces of information might fit together and add to their notes
- pairs combine to create larger groups, sharing their information and own ideas/ interpretations in order to build up an understanding of the idea/text/topic as a whole



## Roles within Groups

**Key Learning: participation and valuing different skills and contributions, cooperating with peers**

### Why use?

- Supports inclusion and participation within groups
- Values less vocal pupils and gives them a forum to contribute
- Stretches pupils' potential by offering roles outside their comfort zone

All members of the group are expected to contribute thoughtful and relevant ideas. In addition, pupils are given specific responsibilities within the group to encourage participation (not all tasks require all roles):

- Task Master: monitors and makes sure discussion stays on track; ensures other group members are fulfilling their roles; ensures that discussion is inclusive and respectful
- Time Lord – maintains watch on the time available; 'budgets' the time and decides how much time should be spent on each aspect of the discussion/task; reminds the group how much time they have spent and how much is left
- Information Guru: records the information and ideas shared; organises information into legible notes; collates ideas
- Consolidation Clerk: checks that all group members understand the task they have been set; asks participants to clarify contributions that might not make sense to others; works with the Information Guru and the Public Speaker to ensure that the final product is in the form required and is easily understood
- Public Speaker: shares the group's findings with the rest of the class, summarising and consolidating where appropriate
- Problem Spotter: considers the weaknesses or uncertainties in any argument put forward; ensures that teammates are not just accepting points without questioning them; scrutinises work for errors and necessary improvements
- Jack-Out-the-Box: considers an alternative for each idea put forward; encourages teammates not to be satisfied with the most obvious idea
- Solution Finder: finds workable solutions for problems highlighted by the problem spotter; helps the group focus on solutions

## The String Thing

**Key Learning: participation, turn taking, awareness of group talk dynamics**

### Why use?

- Patterns within the group are highlighted, including domination of the group by one or more participants and non-participation by other group members
- Encourages participation from pupils who could prefer to take a back-seat
- Cuts down on interruptions and encourages purposeful discussion with developed ideas
- Makes it easy for teachers to see which groups are struggling to get started and which pupils are not participating
- Pupils become aware of their own behaviours and the impact of these on discussion, particularly of the artificiality of discussion when pupils pass the string round the circle and force ordered participation

Pupils are given a ball of string to hold while speaking on a given topic

- the pupil who opens discussion holds the ball of string while speaking and keeps hold of the end
- when another pupil contributes to the discussion, the pupil passes the ball of string to them, keeping hold of the end of the string
- pupils pass the ball of string around the group, tracking contributions (rather than passing the ball of string in order to make someone begin to speak)
- each pupil holds onto the piece of string when they have spoken so that the string gradually forms a web that mirrors the back-and-forth of conversation
- the string webs can then be used to inform discussion of group dynamics and help pupils to analyse their own 'discussion behaviour'

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence Chaser: finds the evidence for ideas shared; checks references carefully; researches information and data needed to complete the task</li> <li>- Dictionary Corner: searches for definitions of vocabulary needed to understand text or task; supports group to identify the correct interpretation word or phrase in context</li> </ul>   |   |
| <p><b><u>Diamond Discussion</u></b></p> <p><b>Key Learning:</b> sharing opinions and working together to come to a consensus</p> <p><b>Why use?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helpful in pupils visualising ideas</li> <li>- Coming to a consensus can be difficult, but the outcome requires it</li> <li>- Opportunity to compare views with others and to compare the final view of other groups</li> </ul> <p>Pupils work together to organise statements showing which they feel are most/least important</p> | <p><b><u>Secret Squirrels/Spies</u></b></p> <p><b>Key Learning:</b> teaching others, building working memory, explanation, synthesis, listening</p> <p><b>Why use?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Motivation to create quality ideas/content good enough for someone to want to steal</li> <li>- Pupils acting as 'spies' learn listening and observation skills and build working memory</li> </ul> <p>Create timed windows during group work within which the group can send out a 'spy' to 'steal' ideas and content from other groups to enrich their own group's work. During these windows, the rest of the group continue as normal.</p> <p>Pupils acting as spies can circulate for a certain amount of time, looking at other groups' notes and/or written work and listening to their conversations. At the end of the time allowed, the spy returns to their group and explains what they have discovered from other groups, leading the discussion within their group on how this connects with the work their own group is doing.</p> <p>Ideally, all group members will have a turn as the spy during the group task.</p> |

## **References**

- *Teaching Literacy in the Visible Learning Classroom, Grades 6-12*, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (20 Jul 2017)
- <http://www.4xr.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Teach-Primary-Questioning.pdf>
- *Talk-Less Teaching*, Isabelle Wallace and Leah Kirkman (2014)