# A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION TO
# GROUP TEACHING

## Guidance Notes for Teachers and Trainers



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# INTRODUCTION



These Guidance Notes are for Teachers and Teacher Trainers. They provide a practical introduction to Group Teaching. Section 1 covers some important educational principles relevant to group teaching: the "**Why**" of group teaching. Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 are then concerned with answering the questions "**How?**" and "**When?**"

Section 2, therefore, looks at different ways that groups might be organised. Section 3 considers the question "How many groups and what size?" Section 4 introduces the important concept of "Teacher Demand" and explains its implications for group teaching. Section 5 explains how to start up group activity in the classroom, including for the very first time.

If wished, the five sections of these guidance notes could be regarded as five modules of a teacher training package.

# SECTION 1: SOME EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO GROUP ACTIVITY



Understanding **why** group activity might be used as a teaching technique helps to determine **when** group teaching might be appropriate and **how** it might be organised.

## Some Reasons Why a Teacher May Wish to Organise Group Activity:

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*TEACHER TRAINING SUGGESTION:*

*If the question "**Why teach in groups?**" is being considered in a teacher training workshop, it may be wished to let the participants discuss and suggest for themselves some reasons for group teaching. [The participants could discuss their ideas in **small groups** and then report the results of their discussions back to a **plenary** session.]*

*The guidance notes in this section can then serve as a checklist for the training instructor for review or as a means of extending insights and knowledge of the workshop participants if some of the possibilities listed below were not recognised.*

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- **Resources** such as apparatus (microscopes, computers, etc) and books, may be **insufficient for the whole class**, but will be sufficient for a small group. If different groups work on different activities, one of the groups will be able to use this equipment. If activities are rotated, eventually, all students will have a turn to benefit from the educational resources.

- Group activity can allow a teacher to give greater individual attention to pupils than would be possible through whole class teaching. This is achieved by setting groups different types of tasks. A fundamental group teaching principle is to set **some groups** on tasks that place a **LOW DEMAND** on the teacher. These groups should be able to work independently or with only minimal teacher supervision and support. Silent reading, creative writing, and an art activity are good examples of this kind of task. This frees the teacher to give close attention (**HIGH TEACHER DEMAND**) to **one group** of pupils. Rotating tasks of this kind will mean that all groups and pupils will benefit from closer teacher attention and support, for activities where this is beneficial. (The concept of "High and Low Teacher Demand" is discussed in further detail in Section 4 below).

- Allowing pupils to work in small groups is, educationally, very sound. It creates opportunities for **cooperative learning** and the development of cooperative learning skills.

- Group work can create the conditions for **active learning**.

- Group work can create conditions for pupils to learn from and support each other.

- Group work allows a teacher to cater for individual difference.

- By carefully organising the nature of groups, the teacher can set different students different types of tasks, according to their educational needs.

- Students can be set work that is more closely matched to their:
    - Ability
    - Previous knowledge
    - Pace of working

- Through group activities, students can also be set work that is more closely matched to their **interests**. Organising group work can give pupils a greater **choice**: they can elect for the kind of activity they would like to pursue.

- Group membership/organisation can be used as a **behaviour management** technique.

- The use of occasional group activity creates **variety**, and helps to maintain freshness and student interest.

- Groups can be organised on a **heterogeneous** basis; they can be organised on a **homogenous** basis; they can also be organised on a **random** basis.

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# SECTION 2: ORGANISING GROUPS



How might groups be organised?  In this section we shall try to provide some answers!

## The Student Make-up of Groups:

*TEACHER TRAINING SUGGESTION:*

*If "__the student make-up of groups__" is being considered in a teacher training workshop, it may be wished to let the participants discuss and suggest for themselves how groups might be made up in different ways, according to __student characteristics.__  [The participants could discuss their ideas in __small groups__ and then report the results of their discussions back to a __plenary__ session.]*

*If you wish to provide some structure to this activity, you could provide the following list as a workshop handout.  Participants could be asked to think about situations when it might be appropriate to organise heterogeneous, homogenous, or random groups in terms of:*

- *Age*
- *Grade*
- *Ability*
- *Previous Knowledge and Experience*
- *Gender*
- *Socio-Cultural Background*
- *Language*
- *Physical Needs*
- *Friendship*
- *Behavioural Characteristics*

*The guidance notes below can then serve as a checklist for the training instructor for review during the plenary session, or as a means of extending insights and knowledge of the workshop participants if some of the possibilities explained below were not recognised.*

The following is a list of reasons as to why and how Groups might be constituted on heterogeneous, homogeneous, or random lines.

**GRADE:** Grouping by **similar** grade often makes sense in the multigrade classroom, simply because different grades may have different curricula to follow. A further pedagogical assumption, relevant to the multigrade context is that, often, the older groups will be able to work more independently of the teacher, freeing the teacher to spend more time with younger pupils.

Mixing pupils of **different grades** in the **same group** can allow the higher-grade pupils to assist the lower-grade pupils.

**SIMILAR AGE:** The same pedagogical arguments apply to those identified for Grade.

**ABILITY:** The most likely reason for **similar** ability grouping, is to allow different groups to work on differentiated educational tasks: the more-capable groups studying or working on more-complex or advanced tasks and activities. Another often-used approach in the multigrade context is to group pupils who can work relatively independently together, to free the teacher to work with groups of children who need more attention.

However, mixing pupils of **different** ability in the **same** group can allow the higher-ability pupils to assist the lower-ability pupils.

**PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE:** It is perhaps worth making the distinction between ability and degree of knowledge and experience. They are often the same, but not necessarily so. In many cases integration will be the ideal, or the goal to strive towards. But differences in previous knowledge and experience may be so great that segregation makes practical educational sense. On a few occasions the nature of the educational topic may make dividing pupils according to this criterion a positive approach. If "The life of a fisherman compared with the life of a farmer" was the topic, it might make sense for children of farmers to work together and brainstorm, for at least part of the activity.

**GENDER:** Cultural considerations play an important part here. In some cultural contexts, girls may feel far more comfortable together and learn more; in others, it would not be acceptable to have mixed gender groups at all. However, it is generally considered desirable to make a concerted effort to avoid gender

stereotyping.  In many circumstances mixed groups – boys and girls - are to be preferred.

**SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND:** In almost all cases groups comprising a heterogeneous cultural background would be the ideal to strive for and should typically be formed.  There may be special educational reasons why this is not practical.  Command of language (categorised separately below, in view of its potential significance) is one obvious example.  Very occasionally, the nature of an educational topic may make grouping according to socio-cultural background appropriate for some of the work.  (See "previous knowledge and experience" above).

**LANGUAGE SPOKEN:** In most cases, it will be appropriate to aim towards total integration, but if, say, pupils from a minority group barely speak the predominant language, they may well make better educational progress being grouped together for some activities, especially at first.

**PHYSICAL NEEDS:** If there were more than one disabled child, there would need to be a very special educational or other circumstance to justify disabled children being grouped together on grounds of physical disability alone.

**FRIENDSHIP:** There are times when the teacher will be happy for pupils to be grouped so friends can work together.  However, if friends grouped together get too distracted from their work, the teacher may wish to separate them!  Sometimes the teacher may wish to arrange groups so that someone who is withdrawn or isolated is helped to gain confidence and make friends.  On other occasions, friendship considerations will not be an issue.

**BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS:** It is likely that on almost all occasions, the teacher will wish to take behavioural characteristics into account in organising groups.  Doing so can be especially important in the multigrade situation.  Teachers often wish to split pupils who do not get on with each other or who are potentially disruptive.  But such qualities as cooperativeness, willingness and abilities to help others, leadership qualities and so on are especially important.  The teacher will probably often wish to ensure that pupils with such attributes are evenly spread across groups.  On the other hand, if a pupil dominates a group too much this may also be a reason for making some changes.

**MIXED GROUPING:** Unless there are good reasons for engineering the composition of groups (and admittedly in many instances there will be) they

should be mixed.  The teacher can either deliberately endeavour to engineer such a balance or leave it to random chance.

[**Important Note:**  The groupings identified above do not need to be mutually exclusive.  In other words, groups can be organised using two or more of these criteria at the same time.  By way of example, in allocating pupils to a group for one particular activity, the teacher may wish to ensure: (i) a good gender mix; (ii) that pupils can still work with their friends; and (iii) that children of relatively similar ability work together.]

## Variety:

As a general principle, the teacher should always strive for as much variety as is practicable in the way children are organised into groups.  A change of activity for a pupil could mean a change of group.  Such an approach can help to keep the educational experience interesting and stimulating.  It can also promote full social integration.

## Naming Groups:

It will often make it easier for the teacher, and fun for the pupils, to allocate names to groups.

In almost all cases, it will probably not be appropriate to refer to groups as, say, "the top group", "the middle group" and "the bottom group", even if this is an accurate reflection of the way they have been organised according to ability.  As is a well-known educational phenomenon, being labelled a "low achiever" can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.  If teachers give the impression that they have high expectations of their pupils, this has a positive influence on pupil performance.

However in, say, a demanding multigrade situation, it may just sometimes be appropriate for a teacher to remind members of a more mature or able group that more is expected from them, especially as far as independent working is concerned, so that the teacher can give more time to those who need it.

Groups are often given the name of colours, but the names of animals, cities, or almost anything can be used.  The educational topic may suggest some group

names.  For example, if deserts were being studied, one group could be the "Sahara" group, another the "Kalahari" group, and so on.

The names chosen for groups could also be used for educational reinforcement: say, names of shapes – the "triangle group", the "octagon group", etc.

Group names could change daily, or according to the topic being studied.  To add to the fun, pupils could pick their group names at random: picking coloured balls out of a bag, or spinning a pointer, or rolling a "dice" on some teacher-made piece of apparatus especially for the purpose!


## Managing Noise:

With group activities, there is potential for greater noise in the classroom.  This can be distracting for students within the classroom:  especially if one group is trying to work on a quiet activity, but is disturbed by a group engaged in noisy activity.  High noise levels can also be distracting for teachers and students in nearby classrooms, especially in an open plan situation, or where classes are divided by partitions and not walls!
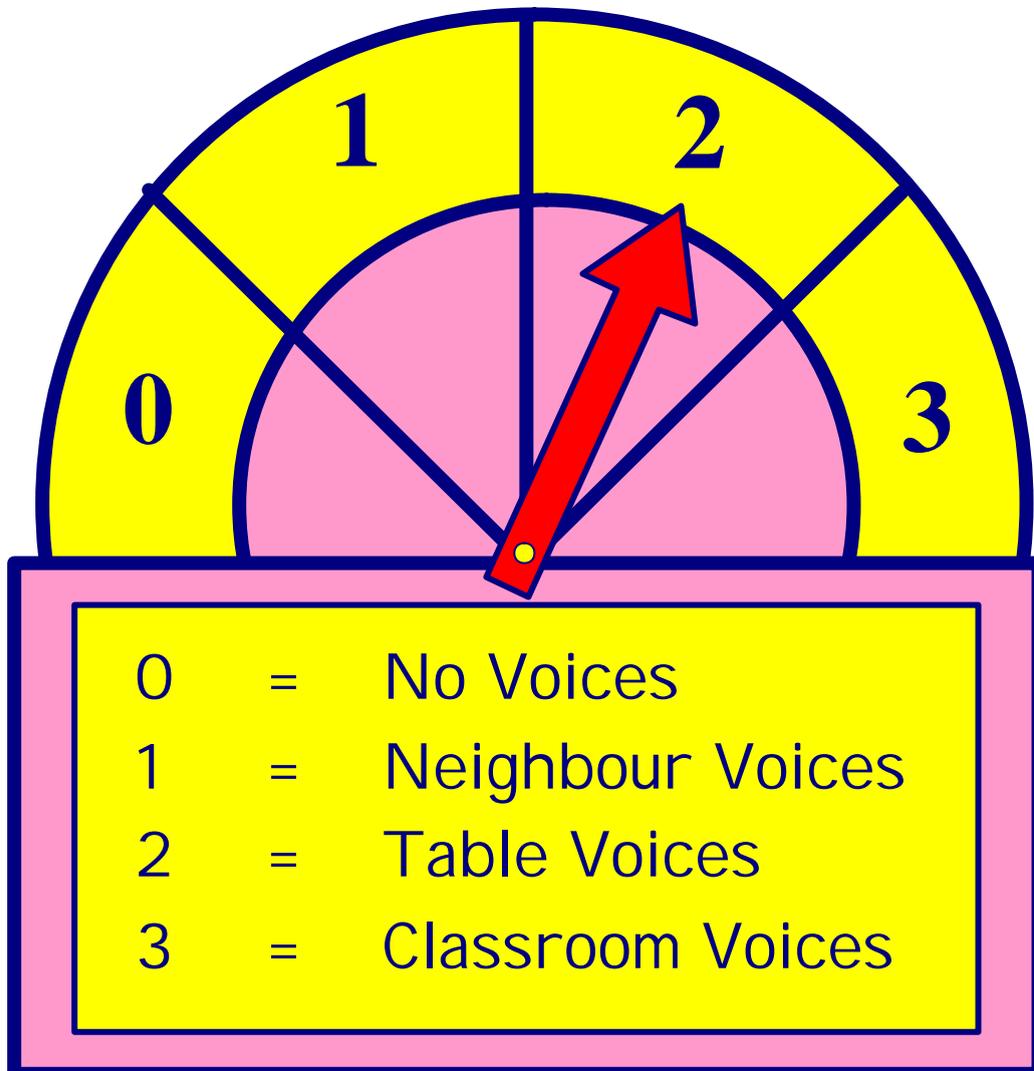
One good way to manage noise is to introduce a "Noise Meter".  An example of a Noise Meter is provided on the next page.

Use of a Noise Meter helps the teacher and the class to agree and set noise levels that are acceptable.  The teacher sets the arrow on the Meter to the agreed noise level.

If noise levels start to rise too much, the teacher can point to the Noise Meter and remind the class that the agreed noise level is now being exceeded.  The teacher could also decide to re-set the noise level on the Meter!


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# NOISE METER



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | = | No Voices |
| 1 | = | Neighbour Voices |
| 2 | = | Table Voices |
| 3 | = | Classroom Voices |

A Noise Meter such as this can easily be made by a teacher out of card, and displayed on a classroom wall.

**Explanations**:

**No voices:** "No talking!"

**Neighbour Voices:** Almost a whisper. "Your voice should only be heard by the person next to you."

**Table Voices:** "Your voice should only be heard by those on your table."

**Classroom Voices:** Voices for classroom discussion, etc.

# SECTION 3:   HOW MANY GROUPS AND WHAT SIZE?



There is no best answer to this question, but it is possible to offer some guidance.  The reason why group work is chosen, and the manner in which the teacher wants the students to work, will influence and help to determine what is appropriate.

This Section provides some specific examples of how things might be organised and why.

## Example 1:

**Context:**  The teacher has a class of 40 students.  The teacher wants to give students practical experience of using a microscope, but there are only 4 microscopes in the school.  This is not enough for every pupil and not enough for the whole class to share. Ten students trying to look down one microscope is a recipe for chaos!

**A practical approach:** The teacher organises a group activity, using the microscopes, for a group of eight students. There will be enough microscopes for one-between-two in the group.  The teacher prepares a worksheet to support the activity.  After an initial short introduction on how to use the microscope and what is expected on the worksheet, the teacher leaves the group to carry on, on their own, with minimum supervision.

The teacher works with the rest of the class, as a whole class, as normal, but avoids teaching any important topic that the "microscope group" will have difficulty catching up with later.

On another occasion, a different set of eight students will have an opportunity to work with the microscopes.  After a further three occasions, all forty students will have had the opportunity to work with the microscope.  They will have had a lot of real, hands-on experience, which they could not possibly have obtained if microscope work had been approached as a whole class activity.

**Note:**  While the "microscope group" comprised a group of eight, within this group, the students would have been working in pairs: two to a microscope, working through their worksheet.  The teacher would probably have provided four copies of an identical worksheet, or eight copies – one per pupil - if it were necessary for the students to record answers on the worksheet.

## Example 2:

**Context:**  There are forty students in the class.  The teacher wants to teach a geography lesson on atlas skills.  However, there are only ten atlases available.  One hour is available for the lesson.

**A practical approach:** The teacher decides to split the class into two groups and decides to conduct a geography lesson and a creative writing lesson simultaneously.

The teacher writes on the chalkboard the title of a story for a piece of creative writing: "You are a deep sea diver. You discover a cave. You enter the cave. What did you find and what happened next?" After some initial discussion of how the students could use their imagination to develop an interesting story, half the class is set the task of writing their essay.

The teacher then introduces the atlas activity to the other half of the class. Students work with atlases, one-between-two. The activity is supported by a worksheet.

The lesson is repeated, the next day. Students who completed the atlas activity take their to turn to write an essay about the diver's adventure, and vice-versa.

**Comment:** In examples 1 and 2, the number of the pupils in the group is not particularly important. Students are working either individually or in pairs. No interaction takes place between all the members of the group. In this kind of group teaching the number of students in each group does not significantly affect the educational activity.

In the next example, students work together as a whole group. Groups of four to six are the ideal number: enough students to create a group "atmosphere" and "dynamic".

A group of four to six students allows for several points of view, plenty of debate, and so on, but it is **small enough** for everyone in the group to feel **involved**, and for the activity to be **manageable**. When students genuinely work as a "group", a group of more than seven students becomes problematic. Not everyone will feel they can contribute actively and the size becomes unmanageable. It will probably be better to divide a group of eight students into two further groups of four.


## Example 3

**The context:** The teacher wishes to facilitate a group activity for students to consolidate their knowledge of multiplication facts and increase their speed of recall. There are forty students in the class.

**A practical approach:** The teacher decides an educational game would be appropriate: a "Tables Game" to practise multiplication facts. The class have played this game before, as a class game; but not on their own, in groups.

The teacher reminds the class of the rules of the game. The teacher then divides the class into ten groups of four: four is a good number to play this game! (Again, therefore, it is the nature of the activity that helps to decide what is an appropriate size for each group).

The teacher distributes the Game Boards and bags of bottles tops to be used as markers. The students play the game. There is a need for only minimum teacher supervision, especially once everyone has got started successfully.

As this is a "low teacher demand activity" (see Section 3 below, explaining this concept in more detail), the teacher takes the opportunity to marks some students' work.

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# SECTION 4: THE CONCEPT OF "HIGH AND LOW TEACHER DEMAND"



The main purpose of this Section is to provide guidance to help teachers manage the organisation of group activity, recognising that different types of activity place different demands on the teacher. In other words, activities need to be organised in such a way that the demands placed on the teacher remain manageable. The following explanations describe how this can be achieved.

## **Teacher Demand**

Some types of student activity and classroom activity place more demands on the teacher than others:

-        teaching a new concept
-        revision
-        silent reading
-        etc

If the demands placed on a teacher are too high, stress levels will also be too high.  An important challenge with group work is to try to arrange activities so that teacher demands and stress are kept to acceptable levels.

To explain this principle during a training programme, the following is a light-hearted way:

Let us imagine we have an instrument, something like a thermometer, which measures teacher stress.  (This "stress gauge" is illustrated on the next page but one):

- Stress levels between 0 and 5 are too comfortable (the teacher should still have spare energy to do other things in the class!)

- Stress levels between 6 and 10 are medium, but manageable.

- Stress levels above 10 are very uncomfortable, unsatisfactory, and unsustainable.

- Sustained stress levels above 15 are physically dangerous:  the teacher is at risk of a nervous breakdown or worse!

Let us now consider a scoring system:

- If one group works on a Low Teacher Demand Activity, the teacher Stress Factor = 1.

- If one group works on a Medium Teacher Demand Activity, the teacher Stress Factor = 3.

- If one group works on a High Teacher Demand Activity, the teacher Stress Factor = 5.

*TEACHER TRAINING SUGGESTION:*

*In a teacher training workshop, to introduce the concept of "Teacher Demand", the following would make a good activity:*

*Activity: Step 1*

*Make a list of **different types** of group or group teaching activity.*

*Here are some examples to start:*

- *Teaching a new concept*
- *Revision*
- *Silent reading*
- *Creative writing*
- *etc*

*Activity Step 2:*

*Sort the list into three categories:*

- *HIGH DEMAND on the teacher*
- *MEDIUM DEMAND on the teacher*
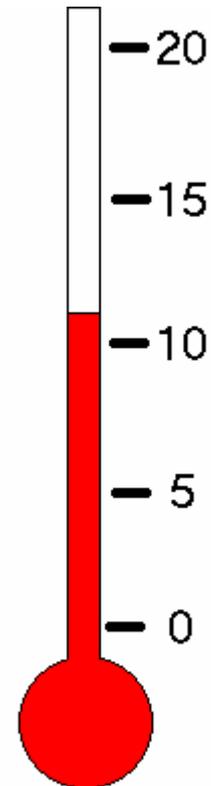- *LOW DEMAND on the teacher*

# A TEACHER STRESS GAUGE

0 to 5 = too comfortable

6 to 10 = manageable

Over 10 = too stressful

Over 15 = dangerous!



*Per group:*

**LOW**      **Teacher Demand: Score = 1**

**MEDIUM** **Teacher Demand: Score = 3**

**HIGH**      **Teacher Demand: Score = 5**

Now consider the teaching arrangements depicted in the following four examples:

Example 1 shows a situation giving an acceptable stress level of:

1 + 3 + 3 + 1  = 8

Example 2 shows a situation giving a totally unacceptable and disastrous stress level of:

5 + 5 + 5 + 5  = 20!

Example 3 shows a situation giving an acceptable stress level of:

1 + 1 + 1 + 5  = 8

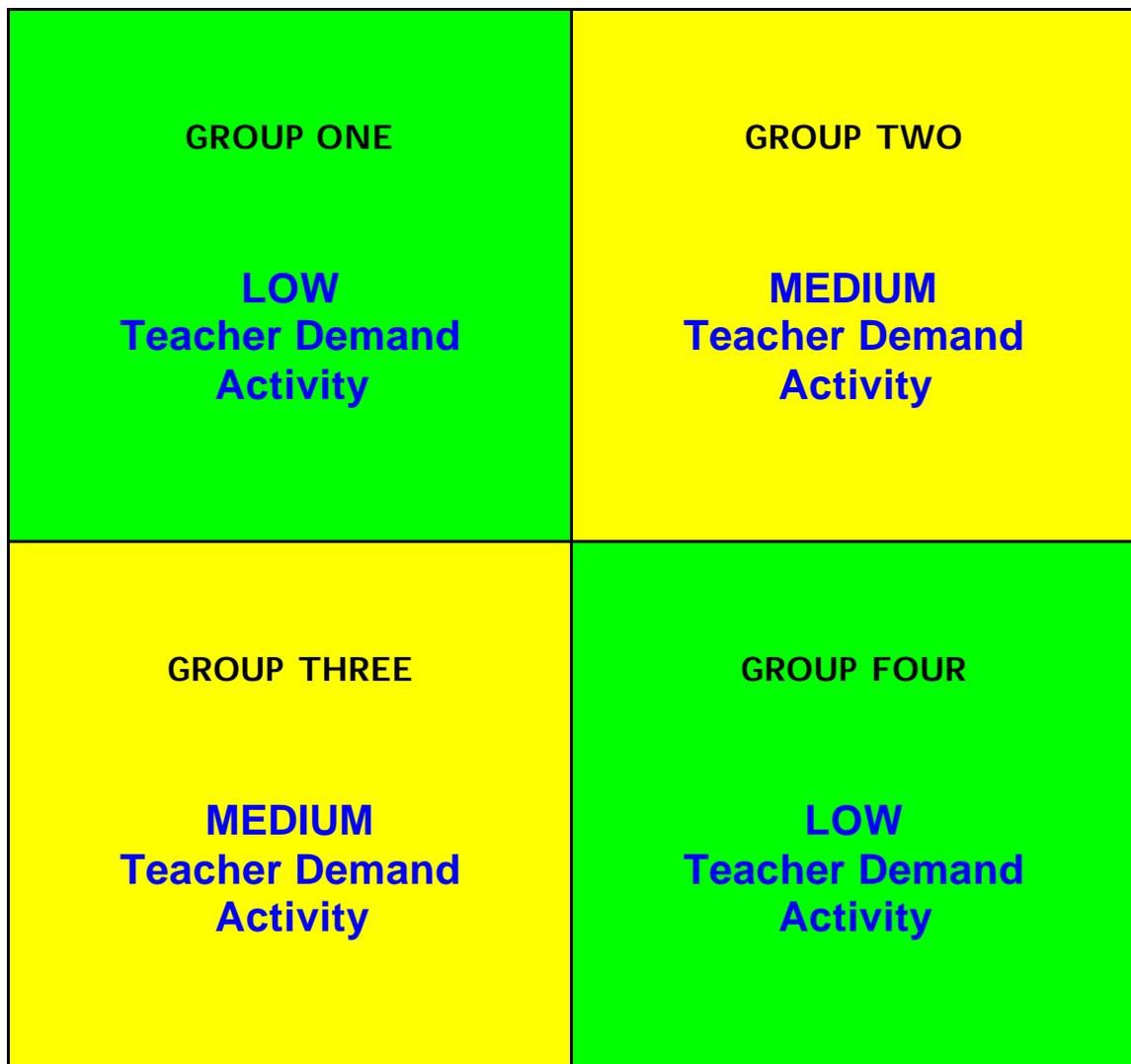Example 4 shows a situation giving an unacceptable stress level of:

3 + 3 + 3 + 3  = 12

In summary, the purpose of these examples is to reinforce an understanding of the ways groups can be organised, and particularly in relation to the demands placed on the teacher.

The number of groups a teacher divides a class into can vary.  It does not always have to be four groups!

# EXAMPLE 1

Pupils divided into four groups:

| GROUP ONE<br><br>**LOW**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** | GROUP TWO<br><br>**MEDIUM**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** |
|---|---|
| GROUP THREE<br><br>**MEDIUM**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** | GROUP FOUR<br><br>**LOW**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** |

# EXAMPLE 2

Pupils divided into four groups:

| GROUP ONE | GROUP TWO |
|---|---|
| **HIGH** **Teacher Demand** **Activity** | **HIGH** **Teacher Demand** **Activity** |
| GROUP THREE | GROUP FOUR |
| **HIGH** **Teacher Demand** **Activity** | **HIGH** **Teacher Demand** **Activity** |
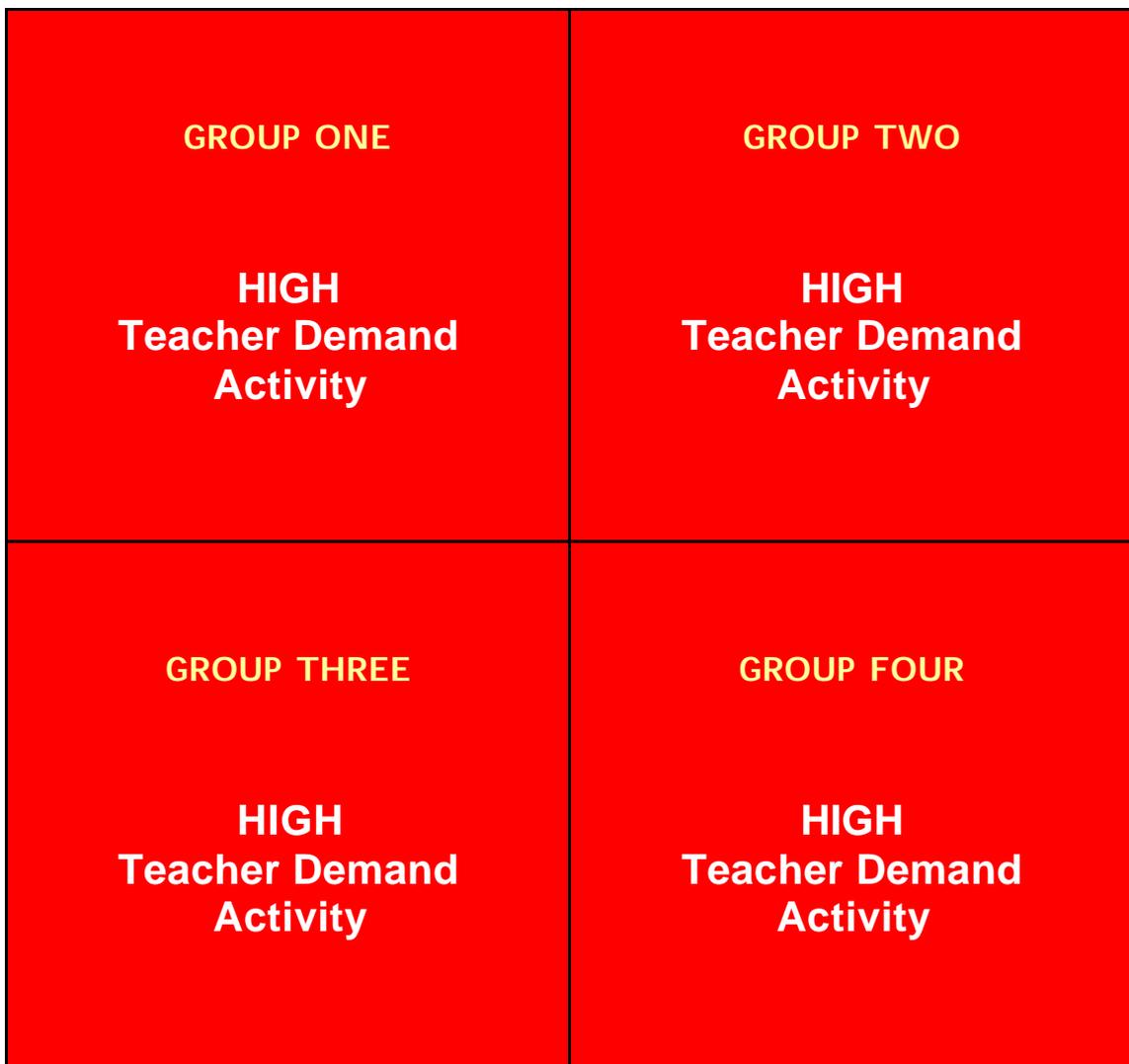
# EXAMPLE 3

Pupils divided into four groups:

| GROUP ONE | GROUP TWO |
|---|---|
| **LOW**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** | **LOW**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** |
| GROUP THREE | GROUP FOUR |
| **LOW**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** | **HIGH**<br>**Teacher Demand**<br>**Activity** |
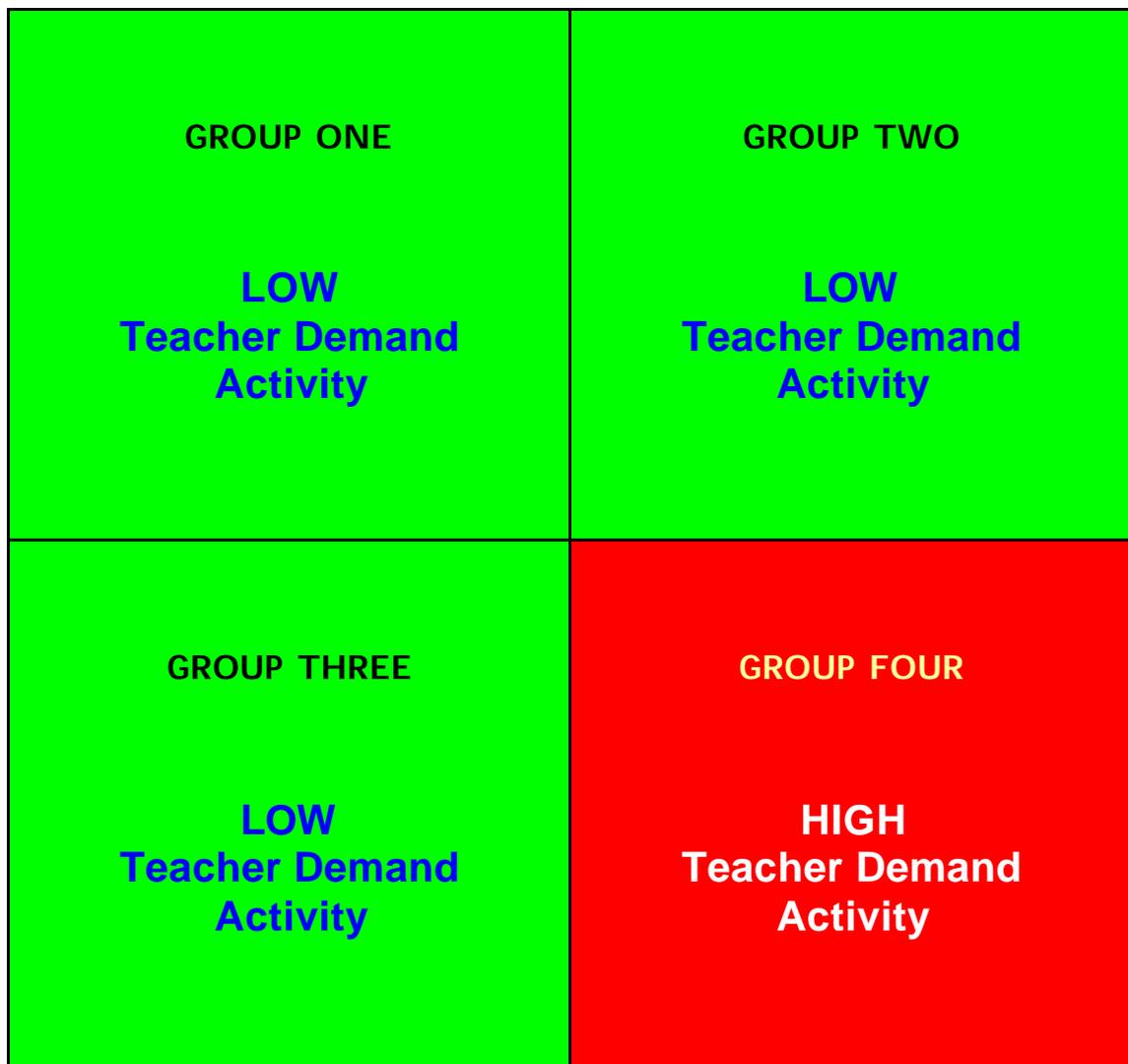
# EXAMPLE 4

Pupils divided into four groups:

| GROUP ONE<br><br>**MEDIUM<br>Teacher Demand<br>Activity** | GROUP TWO<br><br>**MEDIUM<br>Teacher Demand<br>Activity** |
|---|---|
| GROUP THREE<br><br>**MEDIUM<br>Teacher Demand<br>Activity** | GROUP FOUR<br><br>**MEDIUM<br>Teacher Demand<br>Activity** |

## <u>Variation in Demand during the course of a Lesson and How this can be Managed</u>

Demands on the teacher will vary at different stages of an activity, as well as between activities.  A secret of successful group teaching is to plan for and manage this variation.

In the following example, the class is divided into two groups:

| ACTIVITY/ LESSON: | *GROUP ONE* | | *GROUP TWO* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PHASE ONE | Low Teacher Demand | *Group Works on Revision Worksheet* | High Teacher Demand | *Teacher Explains New Activity and Sets an Initial Task* |
| PHASE TWO | High Teacher Demand | *Teacher Explains New Activity and Sets an Initial Task* | Low Teacher Demand | *Pupils work on Task* |
| PHASE THREE | Low Teacher Demand | *Pupils work on Task* | High Teacher Demand | *Teacher reviews work with group and sets extension activity* |
| PHASE FOUR | Medium Teacher Demand | *Pupils given worksheet and work on more difficult examples. Teacher supervises* | Medium Teacher Demand | *Pupils work on extension activity and teacher supervises* |
| PHASE FIVE | Low Teacher Demand | *Pupils instructed to compare their answers between themselves and given opportunity to move on to simple worksheet of extension activity* | High Teacher Demand | *Teacher reviews lesson and introduces a game for pupils to play to consolidate topic* |
| PHASE SIX | High Teacher Demand | *Teacher concludes lesson* | Low Teacher Demand | *Pupils play educational game* |

An approach like this requires very careful planning!

## SECTION 5:  STARTING UP GROUP ACTIVITIES



Starting a number of groups off, each doing different activities, poses something of a challenge for the teacher.

The teacher cannot be in several places at once and cannot explain different things to different groups simultaneously!

It is bad educational practice for groups of students to be sat idle, not knowing what to do, and waiting for instructions. Students will become frustrated, lose interest, and a climate for discipline problems will be created. A situation like this must be avoided.

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*TEACHER TRAINING SUGGESTION:*

*If the start-up of group activities is being discussed in a training session, it may be wished to let the **participants** discuss and **suggest themselves** the practical options a teacher might have to organise the start-up of group activity in an efficient way. [The participants could discuss their ideas in **small groups** and then report the results of their discussions back to a **plenary** session.]*

*What follows below, will then become a checklist for review or a means of extending insights and knowledge if these possibilities were not recognised.*

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Here are four good options:

## Approach 1:

Approach 1 starts off with a whole class teaching situation. However, as the teacher is planning to introduce group activity, before the whole class teaching activity begins, the students will be arranged in their groups. (This involves the students already knowing the groups in which they belong, and arranging the furniture and seating appropriately, ready for when group activity commences.)

The teacher should explain to the whole class that he or she is planning to start off some group activities a little later in the lesson (or day). When the time comes, each group will be given its own instructions separately. However, the teacher will explain that, until these instructions are received, all of the class is going to start off on the **same** activity.

The teacher then sets a whole class activity that places a **LOW DEMAND** on the teacher.  In other words, this **MUST** be an activity that the whole class is capable of getting on with, without the further help of the teacher.

Good examples might be:

- Silent reading
- A crossword puzzle
- A short piece of creative writing
- Writing a diary
- Completing any unfinished work
- Revision
- Drawing a picture
- Etc

Once the whole class is "**on task**", the teacher can go round to each group, explain the group activity and get this started.

The commencement of each group activity will thus be **staggered**.

The teacher has a further choice to make.  After explaining the group activity, the teacher can:

*Either:*

Instruct the group to finish off the original class activity, before starting on the group activity;

*Or:*

Put aside the original activity, and start the group activity immediately.

If appropriate, the group can always go back to the original activity after they have completed their group task.


## Approach 2:

Approach 2 is almost the same as Approach 1.  It starts off with the students already being suitably arranged in their group formations and an explanation being given to the whole class.

Where Approach 2 differs from Approach 1 is in what the students are then asked to do.

In Approach 2, the teacher first introduces a **group activity**, which **all groups** will undertake.  In other words, if there are 5 groups, initially, all five groups will do the **same activity**.  The students will be working as a group, rather than as individuals (one of the ways in which the next stage of Approach 2 differs from the equivalent stage in Approach 1).

However, if it is still the intention of the teacher to move to a mode of working where different groups are following different activities, this first activity **MUST** be a group activity that places a **LOW DEMAND** on the teacher.  It might, for example, be the completion of a worksheet that is relatively straightforward once the initial explanation has been provided.

The teacher is then freed to move around the groups, and prepare them for the next activity, after the initial task is completed.  The teacher can make this activity completely different for each group, if this is what is wished.


## Approach 3:

Approach 3 again starts off in almost the same way as Approaches 1 and 2.  Pupils are arranged ready to start group activity, and the teacher starts things off by speaking to the whole class.

The teacher explains, in front of the whole class, what it is each group will do.  When all the explanations are complete, the different groups immediately start on their respective group tasks.

While Approach 3 has been easy to explain it is not the most straightforward approach to implement.  It will only be appropriate in a particular range of circumstances and good judgement will be required as to when these circumstances apply.

*Approach 3 is recommended and useful if:*

- The explanations for each activity can be relatively short and simple.  That way, the rest of the class will not have to wait too long listening to the instructions that do not concern them.

- Approach 3 can be especially appropriate if it is intended that all groups will eventually undertake each activity, on a rotation basis.  Every group will thus know what is required when its turn comes to undertake that particular activity.

However, if the explanations are long and complicated, these will soon be forgotten and this approach will not work.  Students will also spend too much time idle.

As all groups will be starting on (different) activities at the same time it is especially important to consider and plan for the **different demands** each activity will place on the teacher.  If all groups require a lot of the teacher's attention at the commencement of the activity, the teacher will find it impossible to tend to every group at once.

## Approach 4:

Approach 4 differs from Approaches 1 to 3 in that students commence their group activities **immediately**, without whole-class instructions from the teacher.

This approach relies on each group being issued with **clear worksheet instructions**, which it can follow.

Furthermore, Approach 4 will only work if students are **used to working in groups** and are **used to using worksheets**.

Again, the teacher will have to plan carefully to ensure that the different activities do not place high demands on the teacher at the same time.

## Starting Group Work for the First Time

For a new teacher, or a teacher who has not ventured into group teaching modes before, the prospect of organising group activity can be quite daunting.   A class of pupils who have not experienced group ways of working will also find this a challenge at first.

It is recommended that, initially, activities are kept as simple as possible.  One way to dip an initial "toe in the water" is to start one small group off on a

separate activity, while still teaching the rest of the class as normal.  This activity could be something that all class members will eventually have a turn at.

It is probably better to make a success of running two different activities simultaneously, before trying to handle three or four!

## Not Necessarily More Work

If, say, there are four groups working on different tasks, creating four sets of worksheets for the four groups does not necessarily create four times the amount of work for the teacher.  If the plan is that all groups will take turns to do the various activities on a rotation basis, preparing worksheets will require no extra work: four worksheets will still be used once by all pupils.  What is required, however, is **more-careful planning, well in advance**.

## Summary

Organising group work is more challenging and demanding of the teacher than whole-class teaching.  It does require additional knowledge and skills.

It only makes sense to use a group approach where this will result in extra educational benefits.  But, as these Guidance Notes have helped to explain, there are many situations where these benefits can and do occur!

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