

# **To what extent do cooperative group roles increase pupils' participation in a mixed-ability group setting?**

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## ***Rationale***

Cooperative group roles have been said to encourage higher levels of participation within mixed ability group work settings and more positive attitudes (Blatchford et al, 2003). Within my classroom, many children were experiencing significant anxiety and stress when facing tasks in group settings, preventing them from reaching their full potential. I felt that introducing cooperative group roles could help to address this key challenge and increase participation levels as each child would have shared accountability within the group (Johnson and Johnson, 2013).

## ***Aim***

The aim of the practitioner enquiry was to introduce cooperative group roles to mixed-ability group activities to measure the extent to which the participation of pupils increased.

## ***Methodology***

The key focus of the enquiry was to compare the levels of participation in regular group work and group work in which cooperative group roles were assigned.

## **Procedure**

In week one, children were placed into mixed ability groups before commencing our first group tasks. The children carried out their group work without having a specified role. The children were observed as they worked and the levels of participation were recorded. At the end of the week, the children completed a reflective journal account about their enjoyment perceived level of participation in the week's group work.

In week two, each child was assigned a specific cooperative group role. It has been said that in order for cooperative group work to be successful, pupils must have an awareness of the importance of each role and that each child is equally accountable (Tarim, 2015). As such, it was emphasised to the children the importance of taking responsibility for their job, and that every child needed to participate fully to help the group be successful. Through facilitating group work in this way, it was hoped the children would develop their understanding of effective teamwork (Gillies and Boyle, 2010). The observed levels of participation were recorded and the children completed the same reflective account, this time focused on cooperative group work.

To end the project, the children completed a cooperative group work questionnaire to summarise their feelings about having a group role compared to not having a specified job.

## **Data Analysis**

It has been said that observations made by teachers can be just as informative as formal assessments (Timperley, 2010). As such, a quantitative participation checklist system was used to allow me to record the observed levels of participation during each type of group

work. A key limitation however is that observations of this kind do not provide a full insight into the meaning behind what is observed, e.g. certain types of behaviour displayed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Ticks were placed where appropriate and I examined the differences between each checklist. An extract from the template is shown below:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Participated in group work</b>	<b>Listens to others and contributes their own ideas</b>	<b>Focused on the Task</b>
Pupil 1 (Group A)			
Pupil 2 (Group A)			
Pupil 3 (Group A)			
Pupil 4 (Group A)			
Pupil 5 (Group A)			
Pupil 6 (Group A)			

The reflective accounts were used to collect qualitative data on the children’s perceptions of their participation. I reviewed the comments made and identified key themes that emerged. Extracts from the templates are displayed below:

**Did you enjoy the group work or not? Why?**

**Did you e**

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**How do you feel you performed in the group work?**

**What did group wor**

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At the end of the enquiry, the children were given a likert scale questionnaire to complete assessing their thoughts on the cooperative group work compared to regular group work. An extract of this is shown below:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I prefer cooperative group work to regular group work.					
2. Having a group job improves my attitude towards the work.					
3. Cooperative group work makes me want to take part more than usual.					

The results will be displayed in a table to determine the exact number of children who selected each option on the likert scale. This method was selected as it is a valuable data collection tool for ensuring easily processed and analysed data, however it can be common for respondents to be unsure which option to select, or select more than one option which can render their answer invalid (Bryman and Bell, 2015)

## ***Findings***

It was found that the levels of participation in certain children significantly increased. This is evident through observations and the children’s perceptions.

### Observations

There were a few children who were observed in week one as taking a more passive role within the group. They were reluctant to contribute their ideas, engaged in off task behaviour and displayed a lack of focus. In the second week, while some of these children still demonstrated similar levels of participation, the majority were seen to be offering more ideas, helping others in the group and demonstrating a higher level of engagement with the task.

### Reflective Accounts

Different themes emerged from the children’s perceptions relating to the benefits of cooperative group work discussed in literature, such as feeling included, shared accountability and improved teamwork.

### Included

Many children commented on the fact they felt more included during the cooperative group work as they had a specific role to play:

*“I really liked having a group job because no one was getting left out” – Pupil A*

Another pupil's opinions towards feeling included changed significantly between each week of group work. After week one, this pupil stated:

*"Sometimes I was left out and did not enjoy that" – Pupil B*

However, following the cooperative group work, this same pupil commented:

*"I did enjoy my job because I got to do more and there was less arguing" – Pupil B*

#### Shared Accountability

Many children also made reference to the shared accountability that is vital to the success of cooperative group work. One pupil commented on the positive influence the roles made on the participation of each group member:

*"I enjoyed doing the group work with jobs because it makes everybody do work and not sitting doing nothing" – Pupil C*

A different pupil wrote similar comments regarding the equal responsibility of cooperative group work:

*"I enjoyed it because everyone had to do something and no one was more important than someone else" – Pupil D*

It is clear from this that the majority of children enjoyed the shared responsibility and the feeling that everyone had to participate.

#### Improved Teamwork

Many children mentioned that the number of arguments were reduced and the group were more productive:

*"I enjoyed it because it caused less arguments and we got stuff done" – Pupil E*

A pupil also commented on the positive effect it had on their ability to work well with each other:

*"I enjoyed having a group job because we get to know each other and get along better" – Pupil F*

A small number of children expressed that they still felt excluded and that they were getting involved in arguments, however this was a small minority.

#### Questionnaires

The majority of questionnaires displayed positive feelings towards cooperative group work compared to regular group work. The ticks placed for each stage of the likert scale were totalled. The findings are displayed below:

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>I prefer cooperative group work to regular group work</b>	13	3	4	0	0
<b>Having a group job improves my attitude towards the work.</b>	4	10	4	1	1
<b>Cooperative group work makes me want to take part more than usual.</b>	6	9	4	1	0
<b>When I have a group job I achieve more than when I don't have a job.</b>	8	5	3	2	2
<b>Having a group job improves my overall performance in the group.</b>	7	9	3	0	1

Out of the 24 children surveyed, 16 agreed that they prefer cooperative group work, 15 demonstrated that having a cooperative role makes them want to participate more than usual, and 16 felt that their overall performance in the group was improved during the cooperative group work. Despite 4 children ticking Disagree or Strongly Disagree for many of the questions, all of these children either selected Neutral or Agree towards preferring cooperative group work.

### ***Conclusions***

From these findings, it can be concluded that the use of cooperative group roles in mixed-ability group settings can significantly increase the levels of pupil participation which relates to the views of Blatchford et al (2003), as these researchers found children to actively

contribute more during mixed ability cooperative group settings. From reviewing the pupils' perceptions, it is clear the majority of children were more keen to participate due to the shared accountability for the success of the task, and the way it makes them feel more included and work more effectively with others. As mentioned previously, there were a few children who did not find the cooperative roles to make a positive difference to the success of the group. It must be noted that due to the small scale of this enquiry in terms of time and sample size, the results are limited and not fully representative of the wider learning community. An additional limitation is the risk that children may not have been fully honest, and so this has been taken into consideration.

### ***Implications for Future Practice***

Upon reflection of the success of this professional enquiry, I intend to implement cooperative group work regularly within my classroom to achieve learning objectives. This change to my practice will benefit my learners as it will ensure they are more motivated to participate, feel involved in their learning and develop their ability to work more positively with their peers.

### ***Bibliography***

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