

## **Module E: Preventative and Integrative Practice**

### **Unit E2 : Co-operative Group Work (CGW)**

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#### **Objectives of Unit E2**

- To consider strategies for engaging staff in activities which will support them in enabling children and young people to help one another in the promotion of non-violence and the reduction of violence
- To be able to motivate and support staff in developing an understanding of the impact of co-operative group work (CGW) in the classroom
- To be familiar with a range of approaches to CGW in the classroom
- To be familiar with the skills involved in planning CGW in the classroom
- To be familiar with the skills of CGW as a strategy for preventing violence

#### **Facilitation skills to be developed through this Unit**

*Knowledge and understanding of:*

- how pupils relate to one another
- the personal and social relationships of pupils whose behaviour causes concern
- the operation of classroom systems
- the importance of creating a supportive and caring class community
- how to include pupils' opinions on any decision about their education

*Personal qualities and attributes include:*

- being an effective communicator
- being an effective trainer of young people
- having empathy for pupils whose behaviour causes concern
- promoting *convivencia* in the classroom
- being able to facilitate and value pupils' opinions

#### **Pre-unit reading**

Bliss, T., & Tetley, J. (2006). *Circle time*. Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishing.

Hopkins, B. (2004). *Just schools: A whole school approach to restorative justice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sharan, S. (1999). *Handbook of cooperative learning methods*. Westport : Praeger.

#### **Summary of current thinking and knowledge about CGW**

It is now widely acknowledged that social interaction plays a key role in children's learning. CGW as an educational strategy builds on social learning processes and also the pupil's own role in the learning process (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994a; Ortega & del Rey, 2004). The use of the cooperative group as a basis for learning in the classroom has been a methodological strategy used,

researched, and validated for many years. According to Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994b), learning in a **cooperative** group appears in all learning situations where the participants' objectives are tightly linked in such a way that every one can only achieve their own objectives if others achieve theirs. CGW is about "*working together to achieve common objectives*" (Johnson et al., 1994b, p.14). CGW compares favourably with **individualist** and **competitive** approaches in that it has been shown to promote more complex reasoning processes as well as enhancing the capacity to express opinions and critique those of others (Bossert, 1988; Ertesvåg, 2003). When schools are individualistic and competitive, pupils learn that they are alone in the learning process and view others as their rivals. Such competitiveness promotes relationships based on hostility, lack of confidence and aggressiveness. By contrast, studies of CGW reveal that when pupils work in groups they discuss and negotiate their ideas and learn to help one another (Bossert, 1988). Furthermore, there is a great deal of evidence to show that CGW promotes self-esteem and a sense of positive identity (Candela, 2005; Slavin, 1995). From this perspective, school policies to prevent violence should include teaching methods that promote co-operative values and that train pupils in effective communication, to include skills of dialogue, debate, critique and negotiation. If children learn to work co-operatively with one another in the same classroom, they are building the foundations for their future roles as citizens.

The central point of CGW is that it provides the opportunity for people to express and explore a range of ideas and experiences in the company of others. Groups that are working well will have the following characteristics:

- **Group members are putting forward more than one point of view in relation to the task they face**
- **Group members are encouraged to explore these different points of view**
- **The interaction process facilitates learning and knowledge about the topic under consideration**
- **The interaction process also facilitates tolerance of different points of view and openness to new ideas**

In effective CGW, members have agreed to abide by particular social rules whose values reflect equality, respect for persons, freedom to explore ideas and openness to new perspectives. CGW takes a variety of forms.

**Buzz groups:** These provide an opportunity for greater participation by pupils in a large class event. The teacher may invite pupils to turn to their immediate neighbours and, in threes or fours, to spend a few minutes exchanging views about, for example, things they do not understand about a topic; things they disagree with; things that have not been mentioned, and so on. Buzz groups enable participants to express difficulties that they would have been reluctant to

reveal to the whole class without the initial push of being obliged to say something to an immediate neighbour.

**Circle Time:** Here pupils come together in a safe supportive environment where they can learn about one another, build the team, develop communications skills, share issues of shared concern (such as friendship, being lonely, being bullied) and celebrate achievements. Circle Time provides a space in which to develop active citizenship skills.

**Discussion:** Here a larger group of pupils and their teacher, or a smaller group of pupils without their teacher's constant presence, work to share understanding and ideas. The focus might be, for example, a poem written from the perspective of a young person who has been bullied or a newspaper report on an extreme case of violence in school. Discussions may lead to enhanced understanding on the part of each individual or they may require negotiation in order to arrive at a group consensus.

**Problem-solving:** These usually depend on the discussion of a range of possibilities as a medium for constructive interaction. Often the same task is set simultaneously to a number of small groups of three or four pupils, for example, designing a logo for the school anti-bullying policy or planning strategies to create a more friendly environment in the school.

**Production activities:** Here pupils may be working in teams to produce a magazine or film, with one team responsible for the research, another for the technical support, one for the sequencing, etc. This is sometimes called the Jigsaw method and, as in problem-solving, there are regular reviews of the progress of different bits of the 'jigsaw' and a constructively critical review of the finished product.

**Simulations:** Here participants take on the situation of a supposed real life group. They might, for instance, become a staff team carrying out a needs analysis on the problem of violence in the playground at breaktime. Within simulations, participants are free to contribute from their own strengths or perspectives, although sometimes they may be assigned specific roles and the simulation then merges into our next category, role-play.

**Role-play:** Here, each pupil is given a character or perspective within the framework of an event or situation. The role becomes like a mask and the characters interact according to their interpretation of the role. Roles are usually assigned to reflect different perspectives on an issue or event: for example, pupils might enact an argument at a bus stop and take on such roles as aggressor, reinforcer of the aggressor, victim, bystanders, defenders.

Johnson et al., (1994a) noted greater transference of knowledge in co-operative groups in comparison with those working competitively or individualistically as

well as greater ability in solving problems and assimilating new concepts. Candela (2005) found that students' knowledge and understanding improved when they played an active part in contributing to the cultural practices of their schools. Group learning, if properly structured, encourages questioning, evaluating and constructive criticism, so leading to a restructuring of knowledge in a friendly, supportive environment (Cowie, Smith, Boulton & Laver, 1994).

In this sense, Johnson et al., (1994a) refer to the following points for successful CGW:

**Positive interdependence** To achieve positive interdependence, it is important for group members to feel that their efforts are necessary for the group's success, and therefore that each member is responsible for the common effort. Teachers can facilitate such positive interdependence in a variety of ways, by encouraging open communication among all members of the group, by distributing distinctive tasks to each group member, and by identifying clear roles within the group, such as *scribe*, *chairperson*, *observer*, *mediator*. Commonly a diversity of opinions appears in groups over how things must be done. Such conflicts are constructive and, if properly managed, lead to effective group bonding and facilitate the development of social skills. The CGW approach offers teachers the opportunity to train children to solve conflicts when they inevitably arise within the group.

**Interpersonal skills** In order to be sure that the group is working well, it is essential that there is a focus on such interpersonal skills and processes as: *effective communication*, *dialogue*, *listening*, *respect for others* and *tolerance of difference*. A key long-term outcome of CGW is to prevent violence and to promote the values of non-violent solutions to conflict (Roland & Vaaland, 2005).

**Group evaluation** An important component of CGW is the opportunity for reflective evaluation of the process that the group has experienced as they completed the task. Most types of CGW include some form of debriefing or group processing.

They also indicate that the following issues have to be kept in mind:

**Group members** It is important to take into consideration the individual characteristics of group members, their cognitive and social skills, their participant roles in bullying (bullies and victims should not be in the same group), their interests, attitudes and gender. Students should feel comfortable in their groups and have the opportunity for change roles and responsibilities

**Task** The nature of the task is important for CGW. When groups are not experts, easy tasks are recommended. Once groups have experience in CGW, more complex tasks can be given to students.

**The duration of the group** This variable depends on the type of cooperative group selected. In this sense, for curricular subjects, some authors underline the importance of stable groups for developing basic intra-group dynamics which facilitate the work. In other cases, as in role-play, the group is formed just to represent a story or a situation.

Earlier studies of CGW explored its role in enhancing academic learning. More recently, however, it has been recognized as a method that can contribute directly to *convivencia* and so play a key part in the reduction of school violence. A number of large-scale European projects to counteract school violence have involved the use of CGW as a central focus, for example, in the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project in the UK (Cowie & Sharp, 1994); the Seville Anti-violence in Schools (SAVE) Project in Spain (Ortega, 1997; Ortega & Lera, 2000); the Donegal project in Ireland (O'Moore & Minton, 2001; 2004), and the Rogaland project in Norway (Galloway & Roland, 2004; Roland, 2000; Roland & Munthe, 1997). In these projects, CGW has been used to promote pupils' interpersonal skills in order to prevent school violence. Here we take one example from the SAVE project where CGW was used in an English language class.

### **CGW in an English Language Class in Seville**

This CGW intervention was carried out for six months in three classes of the foreign languages department of a secondary school in a deprived area of Seville, Spain, as part of the Seville Antiviolence in Schools (SAVE) project designed to reduce bullying (Ortega, Fox & del Rey, 2003). The research team, in partnership with the language teachers, developed a CGW approach using narratives, videos and role-plays. Before the intervention began, researchers administered the Participant Role Questionnaire (Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997), a scale which uses peer nomination to identify bullies, victims and bystanders. During the first two weeks, CGW activities were introduced step by step into the English language curriculum in order to teach the pupils interpersonal skills, to promote positive interdependence, to develop a sense of personal responsibility, and to facilitate group processing. After these two introductory weeks, the CGW approach played a central role in the language teaching, including the use of narrative, video and role-play as a working methodology to support the learning of English as a foreign language. Examples of narrative tasks for example were: within a group, to create a common story (in a foreign language) about a boy with interpersonal problems in schools, or a story about the neighbourhood. In these stories, teachers asked students to follow the grammar content explained in the lesson (for example, using present simple, present perfect...). Also students altered or completed a story or scene to practise putting new information into a familiar context, or familiar information into a new context. The stories and scenes were taken from written sources, photos, pictures, cartoons, videos, verbal sources, etc. Role-play was introduced in different ways. For example, groups created stories and dialogues about interpersonal peer relations, with different protagonists that then were dramatized in the classroom.

At the end of the intervention, students completed the Participant Role Questionnaire again, as well as a test of their opinions on such factors as: the class climate before and after the intervention; the academic content of the lessons; the effectiveness of narrative and role-play methods; the development of communication and language skills; the incidence of bullying during lessons. 64% of the pupils reported that learning in a cooperative group had helped to improve the social climate of the class. They also reported that they enjoyed the lessons and felt that they learned the material more effectively and with greater enjoyment. The CGW approach was especially valued by those pupils who had been nominated as victims of bullying by their peers and by those who were neither bullies nor victims. Only 13% said that it had directly reduced the incidence of bullying, however, suggesting that CGW had a more positive impact on improving interpersonal relationships than on actually reducing bullying. The fact that children nominated by their classmates as bullies were less enthusiastic about the method could suggest that they found the method challenging to their power and that they were resistant to the democratic values inherent in CGW.

## **Responsibilities of the Unit facilitators**

Your tasks within this Unit are to:

- send to all participants information about when and where the session will be held and details of preparatory reading to be done
- familiarise yourself with the Unit text and the facilitators' notes
- plan the session to meet the needs of the participants
- ensure that all relevant resources/materials are copied and/or prepared
- lead the session and all the activities

## **Sequence of activities for Unit E2**

This Unit represents a one-day training of five hours plus breaks.

### **Activity 1 Forming the groups (10 minutes)**

#### **Purpose**

- To learn some techniques for forming groups
- To ensure that participants work with at least some new people that they do not already know

#### **Materials**

None

#### **Procedure**

The facilitator starts with the first person to their left. That person is given the number 1; the next person is 2 and the one after is 3, the one after that is 4. Then the next person is 1, the one after is 2 and so on until each person in the class has their own number between 1 and 4. Then the facilitator asks all the 1s to

form a group, all the 2s to form a group and all the 3s and 4s to do likewise. In a workshop of 28 people, this will result in 7 groups of 4 members. (Clearly the numbers will have to be adjusted depending on the size of the group). The facilitator asks people to volunteer some information about how they feel in their new groups.

### **Debriefing**

It is worth pointing out that the reason for assigning people randomly to groups is to ensure that people begin to co-operative with others who are not necessarily their close friends or colleagues. Point out too that there will be opportunities during the course of the day to reflect on the process of getting to know members of the group and dealing with conflicts if/when they arise. If you discuss the principles that underlie CGW in this way in the whole group, you will probably find that some people respond more than others and some stay silent. This can be pointed out without judgement by saying that one of the things you hope each person will learn during the day is which skills they need to work on.

## **Activity 2 Getting to know the group (20 minutes)**

### **Purpose**

- To begin to feel more comfortable in the group by interacting purposefully with one member
- To discover your own level of skill in questioning someone else and in talking about yourself and in listening

### **Materials**

5 questions (devised by the facilitator)

### **Procedure**

Give each group five questions that each person needs to ask one other member of the group (possibly the person sitting next to them). They should be factual questions but they can also be amusing or unusual. They should not be very personal or revealing. Each pair has a short time (3-5 minutes) to do this in. Then they must come back to the group of 4 and each person must introduce their partner to the group based on the information they have gathered.

### **Debriefing**

This is done in the large group. Without pointing out individuals, it is worth noting that there are variations in the accuracy with which people have introduced their partner. Some people seem to have listened well and remembered the information given them whilst others did not. If you discuss it in the group, you will probably find that some people took up more than their share of time for talking. This can be pointed out without judgement by saying that one of the things you hope each person will learn is which skills they need to work on.

## **Activity 3 Perspectives on CGW (20 minutes)**

### **Purpose**

- To begin to feel more comfortable in a small group by interacting purposefully with other members
- To discover your own level of skill in exploring ideas and sharing them with others

## VISTA Unit E2 Co-operative group work

- To get everyone speaking in the small group, even those who would normally avoid it



### **Materials**

Resource 1 *A Quality Circle example*

Flipchart and pens

### **Procedure**

Participants reassemble in their fours. Each group is given a copy of *A Quality Circle example* (Resource 1) which they read silently for a few minutes. The groups then discuss anything that interested them or disturbed them in what they have read, or anything that reflects their work in their own schools. The group agrees on two or three points to make in the following whole group reporting session. The facilitator re-convenes the large group of all participants. Each small group offers its two or three points. The points can be explored briefly. The whole group has an opportunity to discuss anything of significance that emerged from the reports. The facilitator summarises the key points to emerge on a flip chart.

### **Debriefing**

The facilitator asks participants to share with the group any feelings that have arisen for them. Were there any positive experiences to celebrate? Were there any conflicts within the groups? How did the small groups arrive at consensus on the key points that they reported to the large group?

## **Activity 4 Planning CGW (150 minutes)**

### **Purpose**

- To explore the various forms of CGW
- To gain direct experience of practising CGW and to reflect on the group process
- To experience how the group deals with a range of opinions on an issue

### **Materials**

Resource 2 *Case study of Sonia*

### **Procedure**

Give each group Resource 2 *Case study of Sonia*. Participants reassemble in their fours. Each group is asked to select a CGW method (for example, discussions; role-play; Quality Circles; Circle Time) and then to develop a plan for a classroom activity which will be presented to the large group using Resource 2 as a basis. Make sure that the full range of CGW methods is represented in the presentations. Each group is asked to demonstrate its CGW method in action (e.g. in an actual Quality Circle, in Circle Time, in a role-play, etc). Allow the groups 40 minutes for preparation. The facilitator gives each group flip chart paper and pens to write their plan in note form or represent it graphically. While the groups are working the facilitator should circulate, listen to the dialogues and debates that are going on, and, where appropriate, ask questions or direct the debate to the aim of the proposed task. Each group presents its proposed lesson plan to the plenary in turn. At this point there is no critique or commentary. That will be covered during the debriefing. Allow 80 minutes for the presentations.

### **Debriefing**

This is the most important part of the whole activity because it gives the class and the facilitator the opportunity to explore the use of CGW in the prevention

and reduction of violence from the perspective of people who have just engaged in the process themselves. Allow 30 minutes for the debriefing. Questions that facilitate useful discussion include the following:

Initial questions to explore the range of forms that CGW can take. “*What are the common elements of your proposals?*” and “*Have you found differences in the way each group designed the activity?*”

Following this, questions can focus on the processes of co-operation and conflict within the group. “*How did the groups reach consensus in preparing the group proposal?*” and “*Were there any disagreements within the groups?*” and “*If so, how were they resolved? How did group members feel during this process?*”

Finally, there should be questions on the nature and purpose of CGW. “*What is CGW and how useful can it be in violence reduction and prevention?*” and “*What aspects do you think we need to develop an effective cooperative group learning to prevent school violence?*” The facilitator should encourage the whole group to think about how to combine a CGW approach with other possible initiatives in their schools in order to develop a coherent whole school approach (WSA).

## References

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## Further reading and additional resources

### Books

- Sharan, S. (1999). *Handbook of cooperative learning methods*. Westport : Praeger.

### Websites

- Co-operative Learning Center, University of Minnesota <http://www.clcrc.com>
- Group Investigation <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/K12>
- The Jigsaw Method <http://www.jigsaw.org/index.html>
- Student Teams Achievement Divisions (S.T.A.D.) <http://www.csos.jhu.edu>
- Teams of instruction curriculum <http://www.successforall.net/>
- Kagan: Cooperative Learning Structures <http://www.kagancooplearn.com/>

Cohen. Complex Instruction <http://www.stanford.edu/group/pci>

Web-sites on bullying and cooperative group work from Norway

[http://home.no.net/publiser/digital/8\\_2\\_collaborate.htm](http://home.no.net/publiser/digital/8_2_collaborate.htm)

<http://www.nifustep.no/layout/set/print/content/download/1000/9797/file/rapport32003.pdf>

[http://www.skoleporten.net/g-grl\\_samarbeid.htm](http://www.skoleporten.net/g-grl_samarbeid.htm)

<http://www.bib.hive.no/tekster/hveskrift/rapport/1998-1/rapp9801-07.html>

### **Training Manuals**

Bliss, T., & Tetley, J. (2006). *Circle time*. Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishing.

Hopkins, B. (2004). *Just schools: A whole school approach to restorative justice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

### **Evaluation studies of CGW**

Cowie, H., Smith, P. K., Boulton, M. J., & Laver, R. (1994). *Co-operation in the multi-ethnic classroom*. London: David Fulton.

Ortega, R., del Rey, R., & Mora-Merchán, J. A. (2004). SAVE model: An anti-bullying intervention in Spain. In P. K. Smith, D. Pepler, & K. Rigby (Eds.), *Bullying in schools: How successful can interventions be?* (pp. 167-185). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

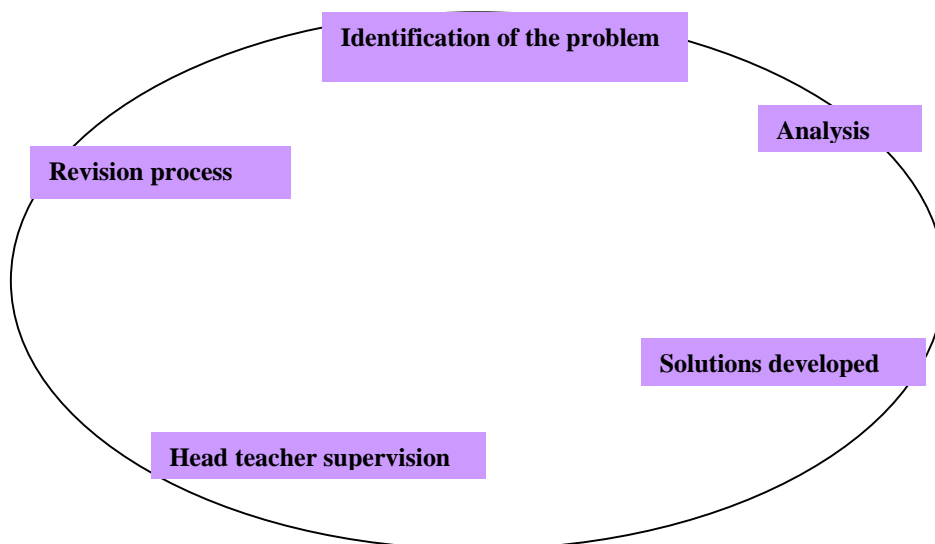
## Resource 1 A Quality Circle example

In one secondary school, a group of teachers are developing Quality Circles as a form of CGW to analyse school problems among students.

John is the delegate of his class. He feels that students have a lot of problems with teachers and the climate in school is not very good. He asks the teachers to organise a Quality Circle in his class.

Once the Quality Circle is formed, the process (as adapted from Cowie & Sharp, 1994) is:

1. **Identification**: the group discuss the feelings students have at school. They conclude that some students behave in a bad way towards mates and nobody says anything. So, they identify a discipline problem.
2. **Analyzing the problem**: using the graph “why-why” students analyze the causes for the problem they have, and conclude that, the main reasons for these problems are that there are not enough rules in school and also, the sanctions are different depending on the teachers.
3. **Looking for solutions**: Using the graph “how-how” students try to find some solutions. Specifically, they think that having a clear set of rules for each class with the sanctions included, students could be more conscious about the things they cannot do. They propose to elaborate in each class, a set of rules with the collaboration of teachers.
4. **Presenting solutions to the head teacher**: The solutions proposed by the Quality Circle, are presented to the head teacher for implementation.
5. **Revision**: After the implementation, there is a revision of the solutions proposed, which can start a new process. Using a graph, the process can be represented as:



For further information on running a Quality Circle see Cowie and Sharp (1994).

## Resource 2 Case study of Sonia

“When I came back from the toilet I couldn’t believe it, my bag was open but there was nothing inside; just the language workbook that they had crumpled and torn. My books were all over the floor. My pencil case, without pencils, was in the waste bin. My packed lunch box was being thrown in the air and one of them was actually eating my sandwiches. I didn’t know what to do, my mind was blank. I didn’t know who to tell. I just wanted to cry and to go away from there, and never come back to school again”

Now, take a few minutes on your own to think about how you could use this story as the basis for a CGW lesson on bullying and how to deal with it. You will be asked to share your ideas with other group members.