

## **What happens when group roles are assigned within the class?**

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### **Group 3I**

#### ***Rationale***

The implementation of group work in the primary classroom is becoming ever-more frequent as education progresses. Kirk (2001) suggests that the purpose of group work and collaborative learning is to develop children's skills and knowledge and allow them to access wider sources of learning. This mirrors the purpose of Curriculum for Excellence (2008) which aims to educate children to allow them to become Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. Children must develop their skills for life along with their knowledge and understanding in order to fulfil these four capacities. Through the implementation of group work in the classroom, children will gain opportunities to become Successful Learners through talking and listening to their peers, gain confidence through sharing ideas with others, develop teamwork skills through contributing to group projects and discussion, and become responsible for their own learning through taking responsibility of a role in the team. Group work can be used across the curriculum to provide children with experiences of sharing their thoughts, ideas, values and opinions which will, in turn, encourage them to use these skills throughout daily life. Building the Curriculum 2 supports this idea, mentioning that "much effective learning is social", and that this learning, when undertaken with peers rather than adults, can be very beneficial to children's learning (The Scottish Government, 2007).

#### ***Aims***

The intention behind this study was to investigate whether the introduction of group roles creates a more purposeful learning environment for children.

#### ***Methodology***

The study was undertaken in a Primary 5 class within North Lanarkshire Council. The class consisted of 27 children, 18 boys and 9 girls. The group work tasks were conducted through mathematics lessons. Each lesson was one hour in duration. The first two lessons were taught with the children working in groups, where no group roles were assigned, and in the following two lessons, the children were assigned specific roles.

Acting as facilitator, seven mixed-ability groups – six groups of four members and one group of three – were devised by the class teacher as literature suggests that mixed-ability groups have the greatest effect on learning (Rogoff, 1990; Blatchford, Galton, Kutnick, & Baines, 2003).

The focus for mathematics for term 3 was Data Handling, therefore it was decided to structure the study with the children forming a question, gathering feedback, presenting this using a suitable method, and analysing the data to describe the results found. They completed this process as a group twice – once with no group roles assigned and once with assigned

roles. These roles were: Time Keeper, Resource Manager, Recorder and Encourager. The outcomes of the study were measured in a variety of ways. The children assessed their group's effort through a blind fist of five at the end of each lesson, through a self-assessment comment card, and through teacher observation of the group work being undertaken.

### ***Findings***

Figure 1 shows that 15 of the 28 children rated the contribution of their group as a whole higher on week 4 after the implementation of group roles than they rated their group in week 1. 11 children gave their group the same rating on weeks 1 and 4, and only 1 child rated the contribution of their team lower on week 4 than week 1. The graph also shows that there was an increase in the number of children who rated their group's contribution as a 4 or 5 between weeks 1 and 4. This increased from 14 children on weeks 1 and 2, to 21 children on week 3 and 22 children on week 4.

Figures 2-5 demonstrate the higher percentage of children who rated their group's contributions to the task as 4 or 5 after group roles had been introduced. These also demonstrate that all children rated the contribution a minimum of 2 after group roles were introduced. Figures 1-5 show that the children evaluated contributions to the tasks as being greater after group roles had been introduced.

The majority of children's comment cards submitted before group roles were introduced focused heavily on disagreements between children. These included "We worked well together but at the start we were arguing about what to do it on" and "Bad. We argued a lot but we worked together at the end". 7 of the comment cards were positive, 9 included positive and negative comments, and 11 thought they worked well as a group. When analysing the comment cards written after week 4, 20 comment cards were positive, 4 included positive and negative comments and 3 were negative. The majority of these cards mentioned statements such as "We did great. I enjoyed it", and "We worked hard and worked together and I enjoyed it".

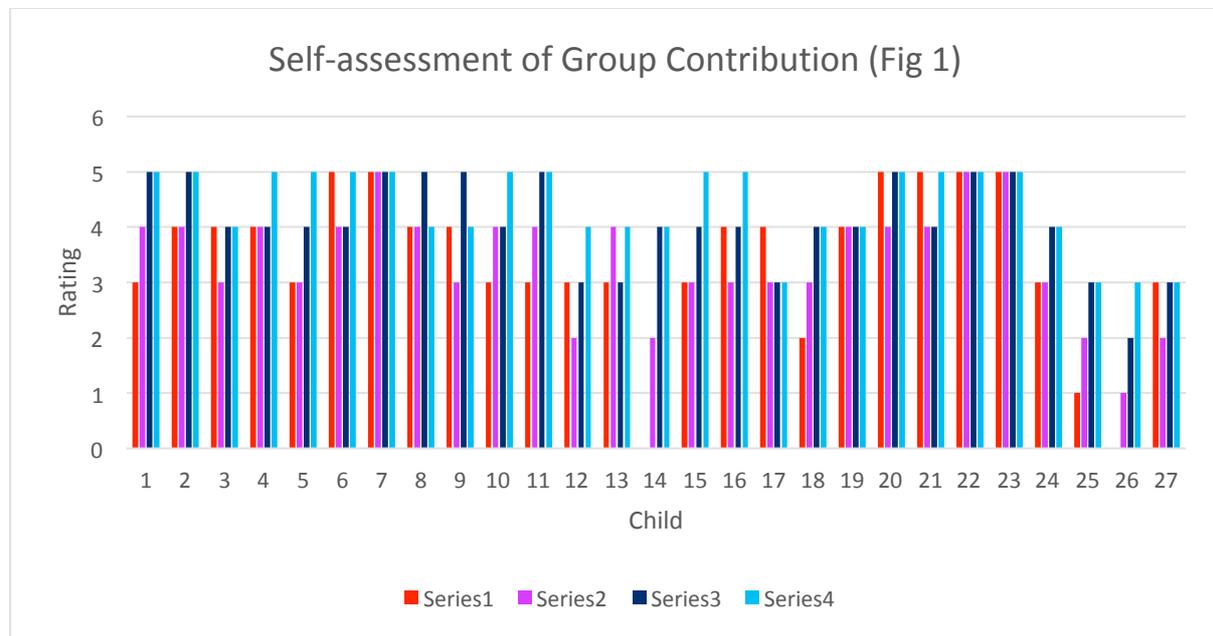
When observing the children working in their cooperative groups, many behaviours were noticed. In weeks 1 and 2 in all 7 groups, there were at least 2 children disengaged with the task, showing this through talking about other subjects and misbehaving. In weeks 3 and 4, when the children had been designated group roles, this reduced to 2 children in 1 group and 1 child in the remaining 6 groups. During weeks 1 and 2 the task had to be stopped multiple times due to excessive noise levels, however in weeks 3 and 4 the children were more focused and the discussions were calmer. It was also noticed that some of the children were very controlling when working in the group, and others were disengaged and distracted. This was less common after group roles were introduced as the children were more focused on fulfilling the role they had been assigned. The children who were disengaged were more eager to fulfil their role, and this in turn allowed more of the children to voice their ideas, rather than all ideas coming from one or two children in the group.

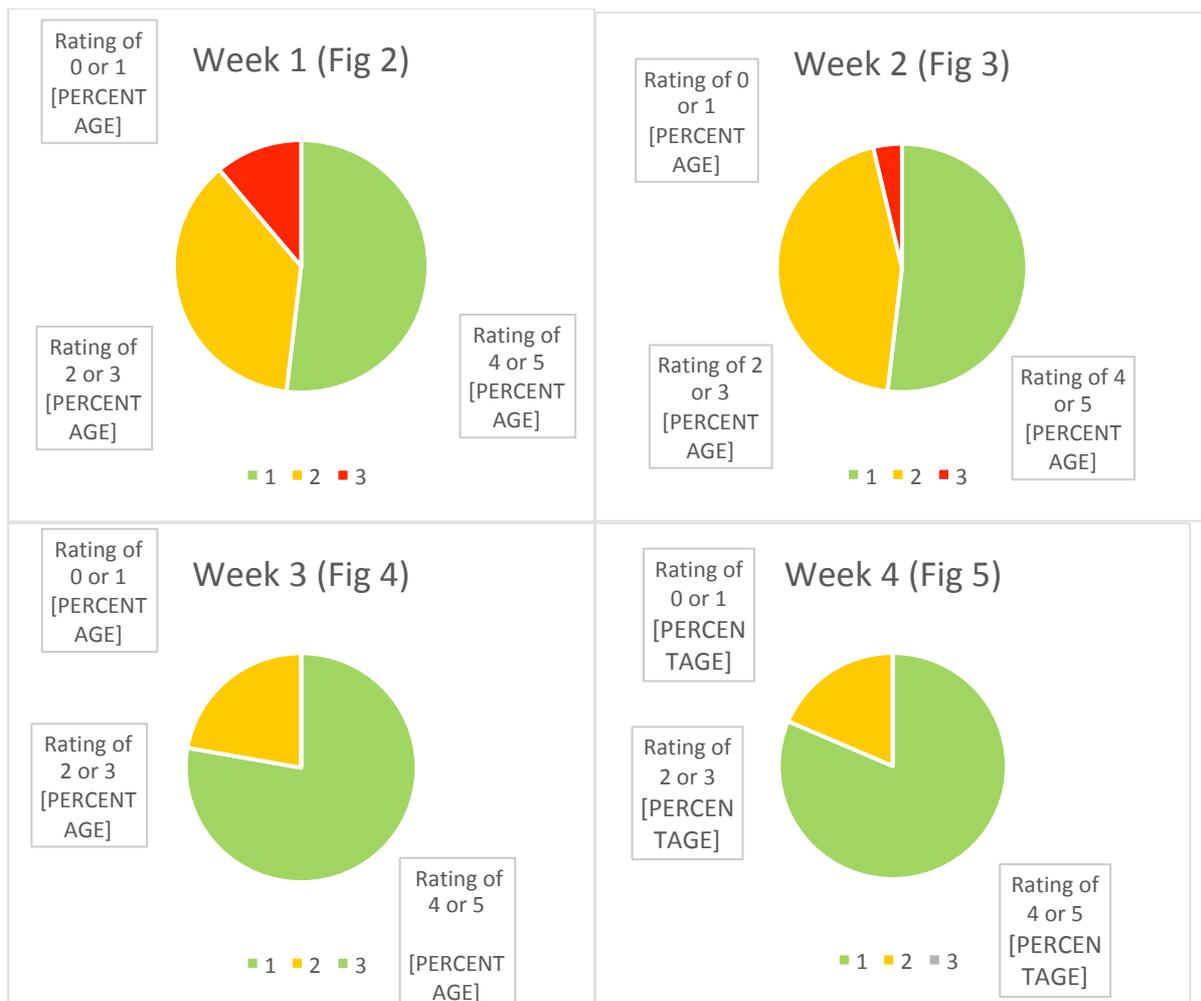
Although these figures show that the children's self-evaluation of their group contribution was more positive after group roles were introduced, the children's reflections were flawed at times. For example, some children were off task, yet rated a 5 for the group's contribution as a whole, such as child 6 and child 23. Child 14 commented "We worked well together but at

the start we were arguing about what to do it on”, yet rated a 0 for the group’s contribution, suggesting that they did not work well together at all. This shows that the positive correlation between the introduction of group roles and the increase in pupil contribution may not be accurate and one component may not be directly affected by the other.

### ***Conclusion and Implications***

It is evident from the findings that assigning group roles encouraged more children to participate in the task. The findings show that the majority of the children believed contributions from the group as a whole had improved and this was also suggested by the behaviours observed during the lessons. The introduction of group roles led to more children being focused on the task and increased the contribution of almost all of the children. When analysing the findings, however, the limitations must be considered. The small-scale study was undertaken over 4 hour-long lessons, therefore it could be repeated on a larger scale of a longer period of time in order for the results to be more conclusive. The results could also be validated through conducting the study with a larger group of children, or structuring the self-assessment process in a more definitive manner. As a result of this study, group roles will continue to be implemented into cooperative learning tasks in the future, to encourage engagement and ensure children understand that they have an important job within the group. This allowed the children to feel valued and understand that all of their contributions were key to the task being successful.





## Reference List

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