CHAPTER SEVEN

PARTNER AND GROUP WORK

Teachers who use the LCT approach regularly create opportunities for students to work with partners or in groups. Research shows that students can learn from one another and can learn and retain more information if they have opportunities to discuss what they are learning. This helps improve student achievement and, with proper questioning, deepens and broadens student understanding.

8.1 Partner Work

Partner work can be done during any phase of the lesson. It can be done in any subject area. Peers can talk with one another, can edit or comment on written work, can read together and help each other with completing an assignment during the guided practice phase of a lesson.

Partner work is most effective when teachers model how to work with a partner and establish routines for forming partnerships. It is helpful if the desks are in pairs or the students are instructed to turn or move to their pre-assigned partners. That way partner work is done efficiently and easily. Expectations like quiet voices, taking turns, talking only with your partner and not others, and following silence signals are examples of behavior expectations for partner work.

**Technique #46   Turn and Talk

Although some students learn best by listening, others find it easier to learn in more active learning environments. Therefore, it is helpful for many students if the teacher poses a question and then tells students to turn and talk about it with their partner. Students take turns sharing their thinking. Finally, the teacher signals the students to stop talking and asks for volunteers to share their thinking. This strategy gives every student a chance to verbally respond to a question. It also promotes discussion and gives students opportunities to learn from classmates and to ask questions that they may not ask publicly in class.

**Technique #47   Think-Pair-Share

This technique is similar to the Turn and Talk technique. The teacher presents a topic for discussion in the form of a question and asks the students to discuss possible solutions in pairs. Students are given time to think about the question. Then the teacher gives the signal to turn and talk with a pre-assigned partner. Discussion time can vary depending on the question and how the discussion is proceeding. In the final step, the teacher signals students to stop talking and calls on a few individuals to share their thoughts with the

entire class. The technique is good for generating class discussion, sharing opinions and ideas and consolidating understandings.

**Technique #48   Partner Work

Partner work is very useful during the the guided practice phase of a lesson when students need help mastering a skill. In large classes, teachers can not help all children individually. So working with a partner gives opportunities for children to learn from one another. Partner work is effective in every subject. Here are some examples.

<u>Writing:</u> Students can brainstorm or discuss their ideas with each other during the pre-writing phase of a lesson where students are thinking about what they will write. They can also comment on each other's writing at the end of a writing lesson. In addition, students can read their work to another student who then provides feedback and comments. There may also be assignments where teachers pair up students to write something together, especially during a guided practice writing activity. Finally, students can revise and edit each other's work to correct mistakes or provide feedback on the writing.

<u>Reading:</u> Peer reading is a very effective method for students to improve their reading skills. Students read to one another. They take turns being the "teacher" and the "reader". The "teacher" helps his or her "student" to pronounce words and asks comprehension questions established by the adult teacher. The partners take turns reading and teaching. Peer reading also helps students improve their reading fluency – how their voice goes up and down, how quickly and easily they read and how they group words together in meaningful phrases.

<u>Math:</u> In math students can work together to solve problems, check each other's work, and explain their thinking using key vocabulary words.

<u>Other Subjects:</u> Students can do partner work in any subject, especially during the reinforcement stage or guided practice part of a lesson. The pairs guide each other to help learn the material. They solve the problem together, talking it through as they work. They can take turns explaining and answering a question while the peer listens and provides feedback and assistance or the partners can do each problem together. It is important for the teacher to establish the expectations so that the students understand how to work together and what they are supposed to accomplish during the time allotted for the activity.

**Technique #49   Peer Tutoring

Peer tutoring is an effective method for helping struggling students. In this approach a stronger student 'teaches' a struggling student. For example, in reading, a good reader is paired with a struggling reader.

The good reader is a tutor "student teacher" who helps the struggling reader to read the passage or the book. The peer tutor follows along and helps the student sound out words, figure out the meaning of words and asks comprehension questions. Tutors can also be assigned to work with groups of students as well. Students who have mastered a skill or topic can help lead group discussions, present information, answer questions, and assist peers with problem solving. Students sometimes understand concepts better when explained by their peers rather than by a teacher.

8.2 Group Work

Learner-centred teachers provide meaningful opportunities for students to work in groups. Working effectively in groups is critically important in school and in life. There are key skills, attitudes, and habits that make for effective group work in school, at a workplace, in civic affairs, and family life. Students who learn to work well with others usually do better in school and are better prepared for life after school. Group work is also an important tool for teachers to focus their instruction on students with similar learning needs and for teachers to assist students in groups smaller than the whole classroom.

In Tanzania, *group work* is one of the most frequently used LCTs (together with q*uestions and answers)*. However, classroom observations conducted in recent years by Mwenge Catholic University lecturers in different schools indicated that pre-service and in-service teachers often do not have the needed skills for facilitating group works for effective learning. This chapter provides techniques and guidelines for how group work should be managed to facilitate effective learning.

8.3 Establish Group Work Expectations

Effective group meetings are organized around clear behavior and work expectations. Great teachers teach, model, and guide practice with these meeting expectations. The expectations may vary but some examples include: one person talks at time, people can agree to disagree, value or accept that people have different opinions and ideas, everybody participates, students take turns, students raise their hand before speaking, decisions are made by voting or consensus, people establish roles or jobs, etc. Teachers need to think about what behaviors they want to reinforce and make sure they teach and model these skills. They also need to convey clear instructions about how each student and the team will be graded. This is often done with a rubric explaining how each student and element of the project will be graded.

8.4 Creating Effective Groups

Teachers have several different grouping strategies to choose from when planning and executing lessons.

Teacher-led or Student-led: The first decision is whether or not the group is teacher-led or student-led. Teacher-led groups are most effective when small groups of students need specific instruction that only the teacher can deliver. Teacher-led review games, where students huddle up in teams to answer questions, are also fun and effective. Student-led groups are useful for practicing skills that have already been taught, discussing learning objective questions, talking about shared readings and books, completing projects, and learning how to work effectively in a group. Book Club meetings are examples of student-led discussions where each student reads the same book or article, develops discussion questions, and meets with the other Book Club members to discuss the questions.

*Leveled or Mixed-Ability Grouping***:** Another consideration is whether the groups are leveled, meaning all the students at the same ability level are in one group, or mixed-ability where higher-level and lower-level students are in the same group. In primary reading classrooms, students are typically grouped by reading level. This allows a teacher to provide targeted instruction to those with similar learning needs. Mixed-ability grouping works well when the goal is to encourage discussions across ability levels or to create opportunities for higher ability students to help the others in the group. These kinds of groups are great for civics or history discussions, writing club discussions where student share and critique each other's writing, and playing teacher-led team review games.

Flexible Grouping: Flexible groups are, as the name implies, flexible in terms of student composition. Students are placed or removed from a group depending on their needs. These groups can change from day to day, week to week, or monthly. Flexible groups are often used during the guided or independent phases of a lesson for students who have not mastered the skills the learning goals. For example, in math students who have not mastered the skill of the day are pulled into a small group to work with the teacher during the independent or guided practice work time.

8.5 Use of Grading Rubrics for Group Work

Great teachers often use grading rubrics to assess group work. A rubric explains how a project or assignment will be graded and is usually organized as a table with rows and columns marking each grading criterion. Rubrics are typically divided into key skill areas that are individually assessed and assigned a score and then combined into an overall score or level of achievement for the project. Rubrics help students see exactly what the expectations are for the project and how they will be graded as an individual member and as a team. Any effective group project should start with this end in mind – what are the learning

objectives and how are they reflected in the grading rubric so students have a clear learning target in front of them.

**Technique #50   Student-Led Discussion Groups

Depending on the size of the class, a teacher may choose to use large or small groups. Once the class is broken into groups, students discuss the topic assigned by the teacher. These discussion groups are an opportunity for students to share ideas and solve problems with peers. It is important that teachers model and establish group discussion expectations and behaviors. When groups are meeting, the teacher monitors the discussions and provides assistance when needed by moving through the classroom, listening to groups as they talk about the topic, offering suggestions, ideas and corrections if the discussion is going in the wrong direction or misinformation is being dispersed. At the end of discussion, one or more groups can share ideas with the entire class. Then the teacher can help synthesize, summarize, and focus the class on the learning goals and main ideas of the lesson.

**Technique #51   Class Presentations

This is done through group work. A teacher breaks the topic—such as characters in novels in the Form 3 English syllabus—into smaller parts (the characters in *Things Fall Apart*, for example). Students in small groups are asked to prepare short (5-10 minute) sub-topics they will present in front of the class. In this example, the teacher might have asked one group to discuss the main qualities of Okonkwo while another presents on Nwoye. The teacher gives enough time for each group to prepare. Students then make their presentations in a given time that includes answering questions the teacher or classmates may ask. At the end of each presentation a teacher corrects errors or mistakes in the presentation and asks the class questions about the presentations that encourage higher-order thinking, such as comparing and contrasting the character traits of Okonkwo and Nwoye after hearing the presentations. The strategy may work better with Form 3 and 4 students whose English skills are typically stronger, but even Form 1 and 2 students can be asked to work in groups to make short, simple presentations as a way to build their knowledge of a topic and improve their public speaking skills.

Technique #52   Prior Reading Followed by Group Discussions

Another strategy is to give students a homework assignment to read and answer questions about a topic that will be discussed the next school day. When the students return to class, the teacher asks students to sit in groups and answer and discuss the questions about the readings. Having read about it, students are in a better position to discuss and share their understanding, and this makes better use of class time. As

students converse the teacher moves around to help students with difficulties. Then students can make presentations, and the teacher makes corrections and summarizes the main ideas of the lesson.

Technique #53   Structured Role Plays or Simulations

This is similar to group discussions but involves the higher-order thinking skills of application and analysis by applying key concepts and principles that the teacher has been focusing on to real-life, day-to-day events. Students are placed in groups and given students cards with information on them about real-life issues. Each card has different information or roles concerning the lesson topic. Students take their assigned roles in the play as described in the cards. Then they take a few minutes to understand their roles well. When the time comes, each member of the group plays his or her part without reading. Each role reflects a different position or viewpoint on the central concept. The teacher at the end of the simulation or role play may ask students some questions to assess students' understanding of the concepts and 'big ideas' that were being illustrated. For example, a civics teacher may have been focusing on the concept of gender discrimination in class, and s/he could prepare role play cards or a simulation about examples from the newspaper or from contemporary Tanzanian society where there are differences of opinion about how gender discrimination should be addressed, and by whom.

Technique #54   Taking the Class Outside

Students in groups move outside of the classroom, such as to the front of the school where there is more space. This can be particularly helpful when the groups might be talking loudly and would disturb one another in a small classroom. A teacher can ask groups to sit in different locations on the grass, while moving from one group to another helping with difficult questions. This strategy may be useful for schools with many streams and few subject teachers. In either method (inside or outside the classroom), students are encouraged to learn from each other. Going outside in groups is also a very useful way to make use of the environment, such as in a lesson about insects or plants where the students can find and identify such objects.

Technique #55   Jigsaw Groups

This strategy is useful if a teacher wants to cover several pieces of new material that is new but relatively easy to understand. Students in different groups are given the concepts to read and discuss, but each group gets different, and partial, information. Then a teacher breaks the groups to form new ones with members from different or previous groups. Each member teaches others the concepts discussed in his/her former group so that, together, the students get all of the required information.