

Below you can see the four stages of a group life-cycle represented in the two ways discussed:

Four stages of a group life-cycle

Forming

(C) People come together as a group. Individuals arrive with many personal worries about their own likely successes or contributions. They tentatively check out other members and start to find out how they fit into the group. Generally not seeking to get involved in conflict at the moment

Storming

(D) Once the immediate initial personal worries are calming down, the group can start to attack the task(s) they have. A lot of ideas and attitudes will fill the air. There may be a lot of energy, and perhaps disagreements and uncertainties, as working relationships are established. Leaderships and other roles will establish themselves, and there may be arguments about what to do and how to do it.

Norming

(A) Things begin to settle down. Arguments and disagreements subside. People start to agree what it is that they need to do and how to do it. They start engaging with their own responsibilities for the task at hand, collaborating and supporting others where necessary.

Performing

(B) This is the stage (which may last a long time) when a group is functioning at its peak, doing the task well, moving towards its goal. Engagement and achievement is high. Everyone is working to their best ability.

Winter

The ground may be frozen and the weather stormy.

As a new group begins, there are various tensions and a lot of defensiveness.

Spring

New life starts to break through the Surface.

People start to trust each other and feel less anxious. Protective defensive attitudes start to relax.

Summer

There is an abundance of growth, and the sun is high.

People are much more trusting and open, working together to fulfil their goals.

Autumn

The fruit is harvested and stored; the harvesters give thanks and go their way.

The achievements are made and reviewed. People prepare to leave the group and go back to their outside lives.

Here are a list of common problems in the classroom with suggested solutions:

A student isn't participating in group work:

You could explain to your students that their English will improve if they *communicate* with it in class, for example to get information, to negotiate, to disagree. Tell them that writing silently in English won't prepare them for situations when they actually need to use it.

Learners are mainly using Portuguese in group work:

You can get learners to agree on a minimum of English to use during an activity, e.g. at least five sentences or 50% of talking time. At the end of the activity, they can evaluate their own or each other's contributions.

Sometimes it takes a long time to tell everyone what their role is going to be – and then there isn't enough time to do the actual task!

Assign written roles to group members and set a time limit for them to read and understand the roles, e.g. 'All the As in the groups, look at your role on page 5 and read it carefully. All the Bs, look at page 6 and read your role. All the Cs, your role is on page 7. You have two minutes to read your role card.'

There aren't enough handouts for every learner so it's impossible for everyone to do the same reading activity at the same time.

You can hand out textbooks to just one group (Group 1) and give them ten minutes to read a text on a specific topic (e.g. job interviews). Meanwhile, Group 2 brainstorms vocabulary for job interviews; Group 3 plans some questions for a job interview; Group 4 discusses and writes down some interview 'Dos and Don'ts'. After ten minutes, the groups swap tasks.

Sometimes a lot of learners put their hands up but there isn't time to deal with all of their questions.

Give an answer sheet to one person in each group – the 'checker'. The checker marks the group's work, noting down common problems or mistakes. Then the checker reports back to you after the task is finished and asks for clarification.

Some learners participate a lot but others hardly ever participate.

Allocate points for the number of contributions group members make, who did best in spelling, who brought in photos or pictures to discuss, and so on.

Learners' responses are often spoken very quietly – especially if the teacher is standing next to them. Teachers then need to repeat the response to the whole class – which might seem like a correction!

If you stand on the other side of the classroom, rather than right next to a learner, they will have to speak more loudly. Then the whole class can hear.

Here are some steps towards supporting students in Deep and meaningful collaboration:

Establish group agreements right from the start. Give learners a voice and provide accountability for all. Children, depending on age, might come up with things like “one person talks at a time”, “respect each other and all ideas” and “no put downs”. A poster of shared agreements can be displayed when necessary, called attention to when a student or group needs a reminder. Assign roles for group tasks e.g. reader, secretary, go-getter etc.

Teach them how to listen – Good listeners are valued but rare in our culture – share this with your students, tell them that people who really listen make eye contact, offer empathy, refrain from cutting others off and are easy to like and respect. Children need opportunities to restrain themselves from speaking in order to keep their attention on listening. Try adding the “Three, Then Me” to the group agreements. Before one can speak again, they need to wait for three others to share first.

Ask good questions – Talk about the types of questions that give the best answers.. Provide scaffolding on a handout with question starters.. SS also need to know about wait time.. When someone poses a question a few seconds of silence are necessary to give everyone time to think.

Teach them how to negotiate – Explain that a good negotiator listens well, shows patience and flexibility, points out shared ideas and areas of group agreement and thinks under pressure. Generate more characteristics of a good negotiator with ss then do the activity “Build a Consensus”. Set a timer and give minutes to group plan a birthday party, a group meal or a day trip away so they can practice the skills.

Model what you expect – in a student centred classroom we work more as facilitators, there is less direct instruction so we can model by frequently listening, paraphrasing, questioning and negotiating. The ability to effectively facilitate a group is a 21st century skill crucial to success at university and the work world