

Curriculum: Grouping

Small Group Instruction

—is an effective way to provide explicit instruction and practice for struggling students.

Grouping Formats

—include same-ability groups and student pairings/peer tutoring, which are effective formats for teaching struggling students

Flexible Grouping

—provides opportunities for students to be members of more than one group.

Planning for and Managing Groups

—requires examining assessment data to group students and determining how groups will function.

Groupings: Size and Function

Most studies on cooperative learning report group sizes ranging from two to six students. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994) provided the following points about group size:

1. As the size of the group increases, the range of abilities and viewpoints increases. Additional resources (members) may help the group succeed, and varying viewpoints will challenge the students to more critically evaluate their own viewpoints and opinions.
2. The larger the group, the more skillful the members must be at ensuring that everyone remains on task, has a chance to speak, reaches a consensus, understands the material being learned, and maintains good working relationships. Interactions increase as the group size increases, requiring additional interpersonal skills.
3. As group size increases, there is less face-to-face interaction among members and a reduced sense of intimacy. Lower individual responsibility may result, as well as a less cohesive group.
4. If only a short period of time is available, smaller groups should be used. Smaller groups can take less time to get organized, and they may operate more quickly.
5. The smaller the group, the more difficult it is for students to not contribute their share of the work. Small groups make students more accountable by increasing the visibility of their work.
6. The smaller the group, the easier it is to identify group difficulties, including leadership struggles, unresolved conflicts, and learning difficulties. Problems are more visible and more easily addressed in small groups.

Design teams generally consist of several people, depending on the size of the project and the number of available computers. With large groups, individuals or pairs of students can be assigned specific tasks. For example, following the group's research efforts, one person may be responsible for the graphics, one person may be responsible for the music and narration in the project, two more people may be responsible for completing the storyboards (based on a group-approved template), and two students may be responsible for entering information into the computer. Group members will have additional responsibilities as well; hence, it may not be possible for one member to complete his or her main responsibility until other members of the group complete their parts of the project. Students will need to ensure that everyone stays on task and assists other members.

The success of cooperative groups depends on positive interdependence, a group goal, and individual and group accountability. Teamwork skills must be taught just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills. For most classroom multimedia projects, teamwork is essential.

