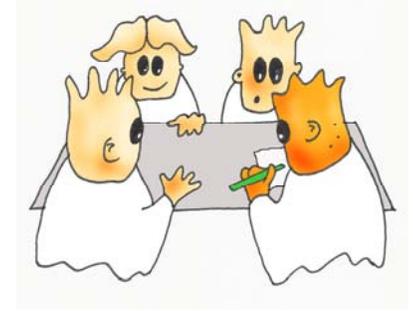


## Why Teams of Four Are Best!



What is the best team size and team composition?

Teams of four are best for Cooperative learning because of the following two main reasons based on the principles of cooperative learning:

The first of the two principles is the 'Simultaneous' Principle. What percent of our students are overtly active at any one moment? Or, to phrase it another way, how much 'Simultaneous Interaction' is there. If a teacher asks a question of the class and uses the whole-class question-answer structure, calling on one student to answer, one of his/her thirty students are active at that moment, articulating their thoughts. If the teacher in the same moment asks the same question of the class, but rejects the whole-class structure, instead having his/her students discuss the question in teams of four, in the same time-frame at least one of every four students is actively engaged, articulating their thoughts. It is this increased active participation in cooperative learning that is partially responsible for the greater gains shown among students in cooperative learning. It is far better to have a quarter of the class overtly active than just one student!

The second basic principle of cooperative learning which applies to team size is the 'Equality Principle'. How equal is the participation among students? In the traditional classroom the equality principle is broken because the same group of highly motivated students always has their hands up, while another group of less motivated students almost never does. The participation is very unequal.

Teams of four maximise and equalise active participation compared to any other number. The only other team size which does as well is a team of two! But a team of two does not provide enough diversity of points of view for many cooperative learning activities. The 'Simultaneous Principle', however, does tell us that within our teams of four we would do well to very often have pair work. Pair work creates more active participation than 'four' work.

There is a great deal that can be said about team composition; we may select students for teams differently for different purposes. There are heterogeneous teams, random teams, multiple intelligences teams, interest teams, topic-specific teams and homogeneous teams, and a variety of ways to form each. The heterogeneous team -- a team mixed in academic ability level, with two males and two females, mixed in racial or ethnic composition for most purposes, is the best.