**Heterogeneous learning groups**

dato

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Cooperation amongst young people is most effective when small groups consist of between two and four pupils. There are two possible ways to structure groups – heterogeneous and random. When young people work together in heterogeneous groups there is more elaborative thinking, a higher frequency of giving and receiving explanations and greater perspective taking in discussing materials (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec). Heterogeneous groupings consist of the greatest amount of variety as possible within a classroom. This would mean that for a group of four there would be one low ability learner, one high ability learner and two medium ability learners. Furthermore this mix could include a mixture of skills, gender, religion, etc.

as a pedagogical tool.

The aspirations and expectations of pupils who are set into ability groupings, rather than heterogeneous groupings, are both low in these settings – who wants to be in the lower set or teach it? When we set young people we give the least amount of variety. As part of heterogeneous groupings the positive mind-set of children and young people develops through their assistance, rehearsal, support and failure interacting and learning within these groups.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both heterogeneous and random groupings. These are summarised in the table on the next page. To get the best of both worlds it may be best to construct a long term heterogeneous team with an occasional random breakout team.

*Reference*

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T. and Holubec, E. J. (1990), Circles of Learning Cooperation in the Classroom Third Edition, Interaction, Minnesota.

In order for interactions to take place in the classroom a construct of designing opportunities for socialisation and discussion must be set between pupils and teachers in order to get along.

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| Advantages |
| **Hetergeneous** | **Random** |
| * Balanced
 | * Side-steps stereotypes
 |
| * Maximum cross-race, cross-sex, and cross-ability team contact
 | * Classbuilding and networking
 |
| * Low achievers carefully placed to maximize tutoring
 | * Built-in roles and teambuilding
 |
| * Language ability grouping
 | * Can form teams without knowing student status
 |
| * Management (student aid for each three)
 | * Variety, stimulation, fun
 |
| * High achiever for every team
 | * Avoid resistance; perception of fairness
 |
|  | * Many transference opportunities
 |
|  | * **Leadership opportunities**
 |
| Disadvantages |
| **Hetergeneous** | **Random** |
| * Teacher time
 | * Team where no one knows content well
 |
| * Fewer transference opportunities
 | * Possible intense conflicts
 |
| * No high-high and low-low contact
 | * Language compatibilities
 |
| * Possible teammate overdependence
 | * Limited bonding opportunities; weaker team identity
 |
| * Implicit tracking
 |  |
| * Negative stereotypes
 | * Teams of one sex or one race
 |
| * Negative metacommunication (we can’t work with everyone)
 | * Limited opportunities to learn how to learn
 |
|  | * Imbalance: “Winner” and “Loser” teams
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