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STRATEGY GUIDE

Using Partner Talk to Strengthen Student Collaboration and Understanding



Grades K - 8

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Strategy Guide Series Differentiating Instruction

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ABOUT THIS STRATEGY GUIDE

In this strategy guide, you'll learn about Partner Talk—a way to provide students with another learning opportunity to make learning their own through collaboration and discussion. Partner Talk can be used for assessing classwork, making connections to prior knowledge, discussing vocabulary, or simplifying concepts.

RESEARCH BASIS

One of the main goals of the English Language Arts Common Core Standards is to build natural collaboration and discussion strategies within students, helping to prepare them for higher levels of education and collaboration in the workforce. In today's classrooms, students are using complex texts and are being asked to use a variety of strategies and provide evidence-based responses. Partner Talk is a best practice that gives students an active role in their learning and scaffold the experience for students.

STRATEGY IN PRACTICE

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For Partner Talk to be effective in the classroom, there are five steps that must be executed by the teacher:

1. Plan
2. Pose
3. Wait

4. Monitor & Feedback
5. Write

Plan

Plan specific times during the lesson when Partner Talk will be used to engage students and increase understanding. Write the questions that you will have students discuss ahead of time and ensure that they promote higher order thinking, and place the questions on sticky notes in the text to indicate when/where they should be asked. In order to properly scaffold the material, the questions should build on one another.

Pose

Before posing the questions to students, make sure that you have strategically paired up students so that they can have thoughtful conversations. In general, typical students should be paired with students who are a bit above-average thinkers, and higher students should be paired with other students who are capable of higher-level thinking. ELL students should be paired with a student with grade-level/average vocabulary.

Have students sit in a position that enables them to see eye-to-eye, be it in chairs, or on the floor. Additionally, be sure to give an indicator as to which partner should start the discussion by talking first, or allow the students to choose ahead of time.

Wait

Give students an adequate amount of time to process the question that has been asked (generally 10-15 seconds). Questions that require higher order thinking skills are sometimes complex and require adequate wait time. While students are processing the question, along with their answers, be sure to repeat the question (in a different way, if possible) and provide appropriate supporting questions and scaffolds.

Monitor & Feedback

Remind students to take turns talking and listen to one another's thoughts. Listen to students' responses as you make your way around the classroom to check for understanding. As you listen to students talking to their partners, provide feedback and clarify misunderstandings that students may have (by asking simplifying questions, as appropriate). At the end of the students' discussion time, choose a few students who seem to have mastered the concept and have made good connections, and ask them to share their thoughts and responses with the entire class.

Write

After students have finished talking with their partners, they can reflect on their thoughts and understanding by writing about their discussions and what they learned. Teachers can use this writing as a formative assessment to gauge which students have mastered the concept and built adequate connections.

Ask yourself how you feel that the process went, and gauge students' understanding. Repeat steps and reteach as necessary.

RELATED RESOURCES

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Grades K - 12 | Strategy Guide

Teacher Read-Aloud That Models Reading for Deep Understanding

This guide describes the basic elements for reading aloud to students in ways that demonstrate thoughtful and deep interactions with the text.

Harkness Seminar on *The Odyssey*

Participation Guidelines

- **Refer to the text** when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory.
 - Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
- Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
- Talk to each other, not just the moderators.
- Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
- **Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.**
- **Listen carefully and respectfully.**
 - **Make eye contact with the speaker and be aware of your body language.**

In an ideal class:

EVERYONE has participated significantly and, more or less, equally.

The pace allows for clarity and thoughtfulness, but not boredom.

There's a sense of balance and order: focus is on one speaker at a time and one idea ("on the floor") at a time.

There's an attempt to resolve questions and issues before moving on to new ones.

There's a clear sense of what the group has covered and how.

Comments are not lost, the loud do not dominate, the shy are encouraged.

Students are animated, sincere and helpful.

The discussion is lively without being "hyper" or superficial.

Everyone is clearly understood. Those who are not heard are urged to repeat. Those who do not hear or understand are urged to speak up.

Students take risks and dig for deep meanings, new insights.

Students back up what they say with examples, quotations, etc.

Students ask each other to back up assertions with proof (if possible). (Not all of the time: there is also a need for much speculation and even "uneducated" guessing in a discussion like this).

The TEXT is referred to often!

• **Remember**

You will ask a lot of questions, and not all of them will have easy answers. The emphasis is on discovery rather than conclusion. It's ok not to answer all of the questions, if you think of an interesting sidetrack to take.

Questions for First Harkness Discussion on *The Odyssey*

Note: these are questions to get the discussion started and/or move it along. You don't need to get to all these questions in your discussion—your own questions are just as good—better, in fact!

1. Why does Alkinoos offer his daughter in marriage to Odysseus when he doesn't even know who Odysseus is? (p.120) What makes Odysseus so desirable as a potential son-in-law?
2. Who is more powerful: Alkinoos or Arete?
3. Are women generally represented as powerful or weak in *The Odyssey*?
 - a. If you think women are powerful, what kind of power do they wield?
 - b. If you think women are weak, weak in what way?
4. What are the key characteristics that make Odysseus seem more heroic as we get to know him better?
 - a. Does he fit the modern definition of a hero in your opinion?

Thanks to the Punahou School for their PDF on Harkness discussion, from which part of this handout is taken (<http://iws.punahou.edu/user/bschauble/ct/harkness.htm>).

Thanks to Larissa Parson at the Urban School, from which another section of this handout is taken!

<i>Team Performance</i>	Below Standard	Approaching Standard	At Standard	Above Standard ✓
Makes and Follows Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ does not discuss how the team will work together ▶ does not follow rules for collegial discussions, decision-making and conflict resolution ▶ does not discuss how well agreements are being followed ▶ allows breakdowns in team work to happen; needs teacher to intervene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ discusses how the team will work together, but not in detail; may just “go through the motions” when creating an agreement ▶ usually follows rules for collegial discussions, decision-making, and conflict resolution ▶ discusses how well agreements are being followed, but not in depth; may ignore subtle issues ▶ notices when norms are not being followed but asks the teacher for help to resolve issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ makes detailed agreements about how the team will work together, including the use of technology tools ▶ follows rules for collegial discussions (CC 6-12.SL.1b), decision-making, and conflict resolution ▶ honestly and accurately discusses how well agreements are being followed ▶ takes appropriate action when norms are not being followed; attempts to resolve issues without asking the teacher for help 	
Organizes Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ does project work without creating a task list ▶ does not set a schedule and track progress toward goals and deadlines ▶ does not assign roles or share leadership; one person may do too much, or all members may do random tasks ▶ wastes time and does not run meetings well; materials, drafts, notes are not organized (may be misplaced or inaccessible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ creates a task list that divides project work among the team, but it may not be in detail or followed closely ▶ sets a schedule for doing tasks but does not follow it closely ▶ assigns roles but does not follow them, or selects only one “leader” who makes most decisions ▶ usually uses time and runs meetings well, but may occasionally waste time; keeps materials, drafts, notes, but not always organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ creates a detailed task list that divides project work reasonably among the team (CC 6-12.SL.1b) ▶ sets a schedule and tracks progress toward goals and deadlines (CC 6-12.SL.1b) ▶ assigns roles if and as needed, based on team members’ strengths (CC 6-12.SL.1b) ▶ uses time and runs meetings efficiently; keeps materials, drafts, notes organized 	
Works as a Whole Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ does not recognize or use special talents of team members ▶ does project tasks separately and does not put them together; it is a collection of individual work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ makes some attempt to use special talents of team members ▶ does most project tasks separately and puts them together at the end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ recognizes and uses special talents of each team member ▶ develops ideas and creates products with involvement of all team members; tasks done separately are brought to the team for critique and revision 	

C O L L A B O R A T I O N R U B R I C f o r P B L

(for grades 6-12; CCSS ELA aligned)

<i>Individual Performance</i>	Below Standard	Approaching Standard	At Standard	Above Standard ✓
Takes Responsibility for Oneself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is not prepared, informed, and ready to work with the team ▶ does not use technology tools as agreed upon by the team to communicate and manage project tasks ▶ does not do project tasks ▶ does not complete tasks on time ▶ does not use feedback from others to improve work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is usually prepared, informed, and ready to work with the team ▶ uses technology tools as agreed upon by the team to communicate and manage project tasks, but not consistently ▶ does some project tasks, but needs to be reminded ▶ completes most tasks on time ▶ sometimes uses feedback from others to improve work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is prepared and ready to work; is well informed on the project topic and cites evidence to probe and reflect on ideas with the team (CC 6-12.SL.1a) ▶ consistently uses technology tools as agreed upon by the team to communicate and manage project tasks ▶ does tasks without having to be reminded ▶ completes tasks on time ▶ uses feedback from others to improve work 	
Helps the Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ does not help the team solve problems; may cause problems ▶ does not ask probing questions, express ideas, or elaborate in response to questions in discussions ▶ does not give useful feedback to others ▶ does not offer to help others if they need it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ cooperates with the team but may not actively help it solve problems ▶ sometimes expresses ideas clearly, asks probing questions, and elaborates in response to questions in discussions ▶ gives feedback to others, but it may not always be useful ▶ sometimes offers to help others if they need it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ helps the team solve problems and manage conflicts ▶ makes discussions effective by clearly expressing ideas, asking probing questions, making sure everyone is heard, responding thoughtfully to new information and perspectives (CC 6-12.SL.1c) ▶ gives useful feedback (specific, feasible, supportive) to others so they can improve their work ▶ offers to help others do their work if needed 	
Respects Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is impolite or unkind to teammates (may interrupt, ignore ideas, hurt feelings) ▶ does not acknowledge or respect other perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is usually polite and kind to teammates ▶ usually acknowledges and respects other perspectives and disagrees diplomatically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ is polite and kind to teammates ▶ acknowledges and respects other perspectives; disagrees diplomatically 	