

Culturally Relevant Instruction

Think, Pair, Share

Teacher Tip

October 15, 2005

Think, Pair, Share is a strategy first developed by Professor Frank Lyman at the University of Maryland in 1981. It introduces into the peer interaction element of cooperative learning the concept of wait or think time, which has been demonstrated to be a powerful factor in improving student responses to questions.

The strategy is simple and can be effectively used with early childhood students through higher education classes. It is a very versatile structure, which has been adapted and used, in an endless number of ways. This is one of the foundation stones for the development of the “cooperative classroom.”

Think, Pair, Share ensures a high level of engagement and is more secure than a large group. Results include increased student participation and improved retention of information. Students learn from one another and get to try out their ideas in a non-threatening context before making their ideas more public. Learner confidence improves and all students are given a way to participate in class.

Think, Pair, Share has many advantages over the traditional questioning structure. The think time incorporates the important concept of wait time. It allows all children to develop answers. Longer and more elaborate answers can be given. Answers will have reasons and justifications because they have been thought about and discussed. Students are more willing to take risks and suggest ideas because they have already tested them with their partner.

The benefits for the teacher include increased time on task in the classroom and greater quality of student contribution to class discussions. Both students and teachers gain much clearer understandings of the expectation for attention and participation in classroom discussions.

The strategy should be introduced early in the process of establishing a cooperative classroom. There are four steps to think, pair, share, with a time limit on each step signaled by the teacher.

Step One - Teacher poses a question

The process of Think, Pair, Share begins when the teacher poses a thought-provoking question for the entire class. This may be a straightforward question or a problem the teacher wants to pose to the class for solution. Low level, single right answer questions are to be avoided in this model. Questions must pose problems or dilemmas that students

will be able to think about. The success and quality of the think, pair, share strategy will depend on the quality of the question posed.

Step Two - Students think individually

Next the students are given individual think time to formulate their answer to the problem/ question. The time should be decided by the teacher on the basis of knowledge of the students and the nature of the question. It may be helpful, though it is not required, to have students write out their individual responses and solutions. Students should understand that while there may be no one right answer, it is important that everyone come up with some reasonable answer to the question. This step of the process automatically builds "wait time" into the classroom.

Step Three - Each student discusses his or her answer with a fellow student

At the end of the think time step the student begins working with one other student to agree on an answer to the question. Each student now has a chance to try out possibilities. Together, each pair of students can reformulate a common answer based on their collective solutions to the problem. At times, the process can go one step farther by asking pairs of students to regroup into foursomes to further refine their thoughts before sharing with the group at large. These small group settings are less threatening to individual students than sharing an untried answer with the whole group. The pair step in the model also promotes much more conversation among students about the issues entailed by the question.

Step Four - Students share their answers with the whole class

In this final step, solutions are presented to the whole class. Each pair of students can then share responsibility for the product of their thinking. The final step of think, pair, share has several benefits to all students. They see the same concepts expressed in several different ways as different individuals find unique expressions for answers to the question. The concepts embedded in the answers are in the language of the learners rather than the language of textbook or teacher. And where students can draw or otherwise picture their thoughts, different learning styles can come into play in the attempt to understand the ideas behind the answers.

Variations:

- ***Formulate, Share, Listen, Create*** -developed by Johnson, Johnson and Smith in 1991 for use with problems or questions that can be addressed in a variety of ways. The "create" step gets students to synthesize their ideas and come up with the best solution to a problem. The steps include formulating an individual response to a question; sharing the response with a partner; listening to partners' responses noting similarities and differences; then creating a new response that incorporates the best of the ideas.
- ***Write, Pair, Share*** – this variation requires that students write an individual response as the first step. The next two steps remain the same as the original strategy. Another variation is to have students write down their thoughts on note

cards and collect them. This gives the teacher an opportunity to see whether there are problems in comprehension.

- ***Timed-Pair-Share*** - If you notice that one person in each pair is monopolizing the conversation, you can switch to "Timed-Pair-Share." In this modification, you give each partner a certain amount of time to talk. For example, say that Students #1 and #3 will begin the discussion. After 60 seconds, call time and ask the others to share their ideas.
- ***Rally robin*** - If students have to list ideas in their discussion, ask them to take turns. For example, if they are to name all the geometric shapes they see in the room, have them take turns naming the shapes. This allows for more equal participation.

Streaming video of teachers demonstrating Think, Pair Share may be viewed at the following MCPS webpage:

http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/development/resources/strategies/think_pair_share.html

*Adapted from Gunter, M. A., Estes, T. H., & Schwab, J. H. (1999).
Instruction: A models approach, 3rd edition. Boston: Allyn &
Bacon.*