PAIR ED LEARNING

PURPOSE
This tool provides an overview of common instructional strategies that make use of student pairs or dyads. Because paired learning strategies are applicable in most every aspect of learning, this tool also seeks to demonstrate how these strategies might be implemented throughout the Learning Model process.

DESCRIPTION
Paired learning has a mathematical advantage over instructor-centric pedagogies. In the time it takes you to engage any two students, every student in the room, regardless of class size, can have a similar and engaged learning experience by working with a peer.

Paired learning strategies are also typically less preparation intensive than other forms of collaborative or cooperative learning like group work or team projects. They are the simplest form of the Teach One Another step in the Learning Model.

These strategies are both simple and efficient. The issue is one of effectiveness. Paired instructional methods require structuring and maintaining the quality of the peer interaction such that it creates the same level of learning experienced by those two students interacting exclusively with you. The ability to design and administer quality control mechanisms is the key to effective paired learning.

The following principles are useful in this endeavor across many different techniques:

Appropriateness.
Paired students can help one another with both drill-and-practice types of learning and more conceptual based undertakings. In general, paired techniques are more appropriate for reviewing or deepening understanding around material that students are already familiar with.

Pairing the participants.
Creating partnerships where one student is more able than the other and acts as tutor has been shown to help the tutor, but to be of little value to the tutee. Most techniques therefore create pairs based on a similar ability level and on compatibility along several other factors like assertiveness, speed and gender (males tend to dominate mixed gender pairs). In most cases it is counter-productive to allow students to choose their own partners or to base choices solely on student preference. You know best what she or he hopes to accomplish and can assign pairs accordingly. If more information is needed, you can have students submit an academic résumé or another assignment to help with selection criteria.

Training the paired participants.
Students will not tend to have a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes of an activity. They are also, as a rule, less practiced in the art of instruction. It is critical to the success of paired learning activities that you train students both in the outcomes and in the processes they are to follow in achieving those outcomes. Often, this training will involve role-plays or practice situations to acquaint students with the process and to allow them the chance for your feedback.

Manage, but don’t squelch the social aspect.
One of the reasons that paired learning has proven effective is that the social interaction leads to a high level of student engagement. This increased student energy needs to be channeled to instructional ends, but it would be a mistake to attempt paired instruction in its absence; this extra energy is one great benefit to collaborative student working. The added noise and seeming chaos is actually helpful to student learning compared to passive listening, as long as it doesn’t get out of hand.

Support student efforts.
All kinds of support can be offered to students in a paired learning environment: Rubrics, worksheets, process flowcharts, demonstrations, and past examples of successful student work can all be useful in orienting newly formed pairs. A shared master resource with answers or explanations is also beneficial and acts as a pre-specified error correction process.

EXAMPLE
Although these techniques have been organized by the steps of the Learning Model, many of them may

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools
be used successfully in more than one category.

**Prepare**
- Students create multiple choice test questions on the material and then administer them to each other. They listen carefully to the explanations given for answers where they disagree.
- Students seek to answer each other’s questions before class. In doing so, they better articulate the questions neither can answer that need to be brought to you.
- Students use pre-defined, well-established processes like KWL or SQ3R to jointly capture and summarize the key ideas from a text.
- Students are required to ask their partner any questions before asking you.
- Students partner to review class notes.

**Teach One Another**
- Students use one of a myriad of pre-established processes to jointly work their way to a deeper understanding of the topic. Among these techniques which have solid research and a good track record backing them are: Think-Pair-Share, Mutual Peer Tutoring, Think Aloud Paired Problems Solving (TAPPS), and Three Step Interview. All of these incorporate quality control and your oversight. Information on these techniques is generally and readily available.
- Pairs act as teams in preparing a class debate. They articulate arguments for both sides of an issue and then present their case.
- Students take on the role of a future employer or a devil’s advocate in questioning each other.
- After making a comment or asking a question, a student must wait until his or her partner has participated before commenting again. This encourages the reticent students while curtailing the over-dominant students.
- Joint writing: Pairs prepare and present a paper reporting on original research.

**Prove**
- Students prepare an instructional plan for teaching what they’ve just learned thereby deepening and solidifying their own learning.
- Using rubrics, students engage in peer editing of each other’s written work.
- Pairs write and respond to essay questions.
- Students review each other’s homework before turning it in for a final grade.
- Students reciprocally discuss and analyze their individual learning experiences.

**Tips**
- **Stick with formative.** It is usually more appropriate to use pairs in assessing each other in formative rather than summative settings.
- **Retain pairs.** Try to allow pairs to stay together over the course of at least several classes.
- **Be prepared.** Paired learning is so much more than saying “turn to your neighbor.” Have a plan.

**Pitfalls**
- **Incompatibility.** Watch for pairs that just don’t work together and after a sufficient trial period, switch to more compatible partners.

**Key Articles**

**Other Resources**
- Get Electronically connected with your peers
- Peer Learning in Higher Education
- E-Book—Peer Learning in Higher Education

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