

Pragmatics of Structured Partnering

Developing a Classroom Seating Arrangement Conducive to Structured Partnering

Develop a seating arrangement that is conducive to alternate partnering, one that allows students to easily partner with two different classmates. You might have students work with partner one for an entire week, then change to partner two the subsequent week. Here are some possible seating arrangements for regular structured partnering:

- rows – one partner to the left and one partner behind
- tables - one partner across and one beside
- chevron – one partner to the side and one behind

* The ideal arrangement (regardless of room configuration, tables, chairs, etc) is one that makes it simple and expedient to move instantly from teacher led whole group, to partners, to small cooperative groups of four students.

Assigning Appropriate Partners

☞ Allow random partnering the first few weeks of the school term until you have had a chance to observe student behavior and social skills and analyze academic performance. Consider allowing students to submit a form to you identifying four students within the class with whom they would feel comfortable and productive working on partnering tasks. Tell students that you will do your best to accommodate their requests and that you will try to at least partner them with a few of their choices over the course of the school year. Assign partners but change at the beginning of a new school term, unit, grading period or some other routine so students can experience working with different individuals (and no single student is stuck with a “difficult” partner.

- ☞ Consider the following variables when determining appropriate partners:
- English communicative competence, including speaking and listening
 - English reading and writing proficiency (consider data from state tests, grades, etc.)
 - subject matter knowledge
 - performance on assigned tasks to date in the class
 - personality traits: reserved, insecure, extroverted, class clown, domineering, etc.

☞ As a general partnering rule of thumb, don’t put high students with low students in terms of academic competence. High students can be placed with other high or mid-level students but not with low. Here is a process for assigning partners taking into consideration literacy and language skills. Rank your students numerically from highest (1, 2, 3) to lowest (28, 29, 30).

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| 1. is paired with | 16. | 3. is paired with | 18. |
| 2. is paired with | 17. | 15. is paired with | 30. |

Observe how these partners work together and adjust as appropriate.

☞ Designate two “floaters” or “pinch hitters” who are flexible, reliable, friendly and socially competent. If a student is absent, have one of the floaters go work with the student missing a partner. Have the other floater go work with a pair of students who could benefit from an extra contributor. The floater will be an additional number 2 in structured partnering tasks.

☞ Instruct students early in the term to notify you immediately if their partner is absent. In that way, you can efficiently assign a floater before beginning instruction. Be sure to pair up any singletons if their partner is absent.

Explicitly Teach the “4Ls of Precision Partnering

- 1) Look at your partner – without staring, turn and face your partner in a comfortable manner.
- 2) Lean in toward your partner – without invading their personal space, lean in so you can hear them.
- 3) Listen carefully – be prepared to paraphrase what your partner said, agree/disagree explaining why, etc.
- 4) Low voice used so no single voice stands out over the class “buzz” during partner discussions.

Structure Academic Language (“Accountable Talk”) and Critical Thinking

Prompt students to use recently taught **academic vocabulary** during the directions for the partner activity. Tactics such as a vocabulary word wall, student vocabulary notebook, providing a word box etc. work well.

In addition, routinely provide a sentence frame or “starter” to ensure students are using complete sentences with appropriate syntax/grammar using newly learned terms, provide “Accountable Talk” stems, model usage, etc.

In terms of **critical thinking**, be attuned to the level of questions asked (a range from identify to analyze, evaluate, etc.) taking care to prompt students to explain their thinking (the “why” and “how do you know” questions) When teaching a new strategy for thinking (e.g. inference), be sure to model it clearly. including thinking aloud.