

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

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Abstract

Cooperative Learning is a very formal way of structuring activities in a learning environment that includes specific elements intended to increase the potential for rich and deep learning by the participants. 'Pair work' is a classroom activity in which the whole class is divided into pairs. It is really a type of group work, using 'groups' of two. Because the point of pair work is to get students speaking and listening, the content of a pair work session should be mainly oral. The paper discusses the historical background of pair work. It presents a list of different Cooperative Learning Techniques using pairs along with a detailed description of the teachers and students activities for each technique. Although there are many advantages of using pair work in classrooms, it also has a few limitations. The paper attempts to help teachers overcome these limitations.

Keywords: *Cooperative learning teaching techniques, Pair Work*

“Whenever Problem Solving is desired, whenever divergent thinking or creativity is desired, whenever quality of performance is expected, whenever the task is complex, when the learning goals are highly important, and when the social development of the learners is one of the major instructional goals cooperative learning teaching strategy is desirable.”

This is a quote by the world renowned experts David W. Johnson and his brother Roger T. Johnson. Cooperative Learning is a part of a group of teaching/ learning techniques where students interact with each other to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter and to meet common learning goals. It is much more than just putting students into groups and hoping for the best. Cooperative Learning is a very formal way of structuring activities in a learning environment that includes specific elements intended to

increase the potential for rich and deep learning by the participants. (Johnson & Johnson, 1990)

- **Designs or Types according to number of students:**

Cooperative learning techniques can be done using various designs according to the number of learners in each group. The easiest is making the learners work in dyads or in pairs. The other designs are the triads or groups of three learners or in groups ranging from 4 to a maximum of 8 learners per group. (Williams, 2002)



- **Pair work:**

The title of the present paper emphasises that ‘two people working together have a better chance at solving a problem than one person working alone. This is seen in the use of pair work in classroom learning. ‘Pair work’ is a classroom activity in which the whole class is divided into pairs. It is really a type of group work, using 'groups' of two. Because the point of pair work is to get students speaking and listening, the content of a pair work session should be mainly oral. For some types of pair work, it is best if students have no books, papers, or pencils. It is difficult to give instructions once a pair-work session is underway, so the activity should be well planned and carefully explained. Otherwise it is likely to be unproductive. The idea of pair work is to improve listening and speaking skills by requiring students to exchange information with each other. It should be followed by a test to make sure that the information between the pairs has been exchanged (TESL).

- **Historical Background**

Pair work can be traced back to what is known as pair learning. It means that one student teaches another student. In contemporary Pair Learning, the students in pairs are working with each other according to the specific structure and following a sequence of activities.

The most ancient predecessor of Pair Learning is 25 centuries old: Socratic Dialogues. Socrates was not talking “to anybody,” but rather “eye to eye.” With his sophisticated questions, Socrates helped his counterpart “giving birth” to the conclusion.

Next predecessor of Pair Learning is 2 centuries old: pair method used by Pater Gregor Girard to teach poor children in Switzerland. In his school 4 teachers worked with 400 students! What could they do? Girard said, “You will teach each other and switch the partners.” Since then, the Pair Learning was evolved by efforts of thousands teachers. (Gromyko, 2009)

• **Different Cooperative Learning Techniques using pairs:**

Sr. No.	Name of the technique	Description
1.	Think Pair Share	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students are paired 2. Present a problem 3. Give them time to think on their own about possible answers 4. Allow them to discuss their answers with their partners 5. Call any pair at random to share their answers with the whole class
2	Timed Pair Share	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher announces topic and time limit 2. Teacher gives “Think Time” 3. Partner A shares; Partner B listens 4. Partner B praises 5. Partners switch roles
3	Think Pair Ink Share	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students use wait time to think about an idea or question, write down their responses, and then pair with a partner for discussion. 2. Individuals return to what they wrote and modify their first ideas to reflect new thinking. 3. Students can then share their reflections within a small group or with a partner.
4	Find Someone Who	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stand up, hand up, pair up 2. High five your partner 3. In pairs, Partner A asks a question from worksheet; Partner ‘B’ responds. Partner ‘A’ records the answer on his own worksheet 4. Partner ‘B’ checks and initials the answer 5. Partner ‘B’ asks a question; Partner ‘A’ responds. Partner ‘B’ records the answer on his own worksheet

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Partner A checks and initials the answer 7. Partners high five, separate, raise hand and find new partner 8. Students repeat steps 1-7 until worksheet is complete
5	Paired Heads Together	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers divide the class into pairs. 2. Each members in a pair is given named 'A' and the partner 'B' 3. Questions are asked to the class. 4. Pairs work together to answer the question so that all can verbally answer the question. 5. Teacher selects a pair and asks the question 6. The teacher calls out 'A' and all the 'A's have to answer. 7. Alternatively the teacher can call out 'B' and all the 'B's have to give the answer. 8. Students can be given chart paper to write their answers and can show the answers all at once.
Sr. No.	Name of the technique	Description
6	Pairs Check	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher poses a problem 2. One partner solves the problem while the other coaches; additions or changes are discussed 3. Students switch roles for the next problem 4. After every two problems, the pairs check their answers with another pair
7	Pairs Compare	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pairs generate ideas or answers 2. Compare their answers with another pair 3. Then see if working together they can come up with additional responses neither pair alone had.
8	Rally Robin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher asks questions with multiple possible answers 2. Partners take turns giving short quick answers
9	Rally Table	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher asks questions with multiple possible answers 2. Partners take turns writing answers on one paper
10	Rally Coach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner 'A' solves the first problem 2. Partner 'B' watches listens, checks, and praises 3. Partner 'B' solves the next problem 4. Partner 'A' watches listens, checks, and praises

		5. Repeat starting at step one
11	Three step interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher Provide interview questions. 2. In pairs, student 'A' interviews student 'B', practicing listening and questioning skills. 3. Students reverse roles and 'B' interviews 'A'. 4. Pairs team up with another pair to form groups of four. 5. Each member of the group introduces the partner interviewed, sharing interesting points.
12	Mix-Pair-Share	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students silently mix around the room 2. Teacher calls "pair" 3. Students pair up with person closest to them 4. High Five your partner 5. Teacher asks question and gives Think Time 6. Partners share using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Timed Pair Share -Rally Robin

Apart from the above mentioned techniques there are many more pair work cooperative learning techniques. However the ones that are suitable for large classrooms without making major changes in the sitting arrangement have been discussed in the above table.

• **Who Benefits from Pair Learning? First of All, Students!**

- Pair Learning is literally a good luck to any student, the natural environment for development of their best talents! Pair Learning brings liberty to the school life. The student's liberty in pair classes takes realistic shape.
- Learning time is managed by students: dialogue partners decide on their own when to begin, make pause, and finish the work
- Pace of work is controlled by students; every pair works as long as students' quickness of wit allows: quick learners get everything fast, and can learn more in the same timeframe; slow students need more time to fill the gaps in understanding

- Students possess sufficient liberty to select the topics and exchange them with other students
- Students on their own choose the “teachers,” i.e. the partners in pair. The more students are there in the group, the easier each student can choose an appropriate “teacher” who “can better explain the topic”
- Students on their own choose the most comfortable place for learning: more light, warmer or cooler, closer to the window or to the door, etc.
- Hence, the Pair Learning provides the students with multiple liberties: in time, in pace of work, in topic of learning, in choice of partner in pair, and in choice of comfortable place for learning.

Experts say that even one of these liberties provided by Pair Learning to the students is a sufficient motivator to learning. Realistically, Pair Learning provides five! This is why Pair Learning solves the problem of motivation completely, at once, and for free! This fact benefits not only the students, but teacher, too – we’ll talk about teacher’s benefits later in more detail.

- **Who Benefits from Pair Learning? Parents, Too!**

- Parents of students learning in pairs observe pleasant changes in their kids:
- Children willingly go to school! Many of them enjoy learning! Parents see that because kids tend to spend longer hours in the school;
- Eventually, kids less and less conflict with each other and with parents. Children resolve the conflict situations easier.
- When parents mention that, they ask teacher, “How come?” Teacher explains that children stay longer at school because their motivation to learning increased.

Conflicts disappeared because children greatly improve their communication skills while working in pairs... Children become more socially competent.

- Later, parents notice that kids get A's and B's only
- More attentive parents later, in two or three years, notice that their children became healthier: they get cold less frequently than before, and other health problems steadily came to nought.

- **Who Benefits from Pair Learning? Teacher, Too!**

- "Teacher" is the person who educates, teaches, i.e. school teacher, college teacher, university professor, etc. The teacher who uses Pair Learning notices the positive changes
- Students are strongly motivated to learn, they are active and happy in the classes
- No wonder, there are no problems with students' behavior both in class and at breaks
- Students' learning and educating improves not only in major classes, but also in other classes such as arts, sports, etc.
- Teacher's function changes; now, teacher is not a "supervisor," but rather a "conductor" of learning group
- Teacher helps students choosing the appropriate partners for work in pairs
- Teacher helps students to properly work in pairs by using the algorithms for pair work
- Teacher pays more attention to slow students; quick learners are provided with additional tasks

- Teacher better controls learning accomplishments by working with student in pair
 - Teacher takes care to provide the classroom with enough sources of knowledge such as books, magazines and “strangers”
 - Now, teacher isn’t busy with students’ behavior; however, students impose stronger requirements on teacher’s knowledge, and teacher has to meet these requirements. (Gromyko, 2009)
- **How to overcome the obstacles in implementation?**
 - 1) high noise level: If pair work is successful, it's noisy. There's no way of avoiding this problem in a classroom — except perhaps in the unusual situation of a room that is much too large for the class it contains. Of course, students can be asked to speak quietly, but pushing this may have an inhibiting effect. In a normally crowded classroom equipped with easily movable desks or tables, the problem can be alleviated by keeping as much distance as possible between the pairs. The best ‘solution,’ however is simply to keep pair-work sessions short — twenty minutes is probably a reasonable maximum. A high level of noise can be tolerated for approximately that amount of time. If the session lasts longer, the noise will become distracting and annoying.
 - (2) Furniture: The best furniture for a classroom is small, light tables, and simple, light chairs; these can easily be rearranged for pair work. Large tables are difficult to move and to arrange but if they are accompanied by light, movable chairs, they can often be left in place and chairs placed opposite each other on both sides. Fixed tables or fixed desks, particularly those with attached seats discourage pair work but they do not make it impossible. Something that works fairly well can always be figured out.
 - (3) Partners with no information to offer: Since information exchange is essential to pair work, if one student in a group has no information to exchange, the activity will fail.

When pair work is preceded by an ‘information-acquiring activity’ — as in the paired stories activity for example — this problem can be largely eliminated by making sure that everyone understands their material well. And of course it is also important to make sure that the information and the method of conveying it are appropriate for the students’ level.

The best way to alleviate this difficulty is by ‘rotation’ — having students change partners — once, twice, or more — during the activity. Doing this means that each of the conversations will have to be kept quite short in order to keep the whole activity within the twenty-minute time span, but that, it is to be hoped, will bring a healthy intensity to the conversations. Rotation also requires a good deal of shifting from one place to another and that may cause some complaints during the first pair-work sessions. These complaints will quickly be forgotten, however, as students get used to doing pair work.

Work with larger groups presents the same difficulties that pair work does but not to the same degree: the noise level will be lower because fewer students will be speaking at the same time; furniture is less likely to be an obstacle because less moving is required and large tables work well; and the success of the activity will not be jeopardized because one student can’t participate fully.

- **Precautions: How to set up pair and group work**

- Be sure to fully explain the procedure before splitting the class up.
- Always demonstrate either yourself or with the help of a volunteer exactly what they have to do.
- Ask them to tell you what they have to do before they do it (in their mother tongue if need be) to check their understanding.
- Have fill in activities ready for the quick finishers – but be sure that they have completed the task correctly first and haven’t just finished early because they misunderstood what they had to do.

- Don't forget to have feedback time after pair work so that the children don't feel that they have been wasting time. It's important to share their work as a whole group although this doesn't have to be systematic.
- Set a clear time limit.
- Control who works with who so children aren't always being dominated or dominating others. (Bertrand, 2009)

- **Conclusion**

Pair work helps to overcome infrastructural arrangements and limitations as it does not require too much of modifications which may be required for group work. Hence it is a simple and straight forward way to make the classroom interactive and enjoyable. It also helps to make learning interesting, long lasting and meaningful. Furthermore it also facilitates the development of social skills and communication skills which are essential in today's world. This technique gives all types of students the opportunity to participate in the learning process and enjoy the feeling of success and achievement.

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