

Oral Language Activities

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an inclusive strategy that encourages the generation of ideas, collaboration, and creative thinking.

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into small groups and provide chart paper and markers to each group.
2. Set an inquiry question or topic for the class to brainstorm within each small group. Brainstormed ideas are written on the chart paper.
3. Set a time limit for the brainstorming session and identify a signal for closure.
4. Suggested rules for brainstorming include:
 - ALL ideas are welcomed! They can be refined later, but in brainstorming all ideas are collected first.
 - Take turns by going around the group so that everyone gets a chance to contribute.
 - Elect one person to jot down ideas on the chart paper.
 - Elect one person to present the ideas to the class.
5. Each group shares the ideas with the class. Chart the ideas and identify the ones that have some class agreement.

Focused Reporting

During a whole-group sharing session, a focused reporting activity enables groups of students to contribute to the discussion without one group dominating or sharing all the possible ideas.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into small groups and provide a discussion prompt. Inform students of the procedure for sharing their ideas when they return to the whole group (e.g., share only two important points or set a time-limit to sharing).
2. Provide time for small group discussion.
3. Prompt students to share two important points as each group shares their thinking.

Inside-Outside Circle

The Inside-Outside Circle activity offers opportunities for students to engage in discussions where they experience a variety of ideas and perspectives. Every student gets a chance to speak with, and listen to, different people. As the strategy involves movement, it is an effective way to address kinesthetic learners.

Procedure:

1. Direct students to find a partner and number themselves “One” and “Two.”
2. Direct all Number Ones to stand in a circle facing out. Have Number Twos stand facing their partners.
3. Pose a question and have students think about the question for about 30 seconds.
4. Have Partner One share his/her answer or solution with Partner Two. When Partner One is finished he/she says, “Pass.” Partner Two paraphrases what Partner One said, and then adds his/her own response, which Partner One then paraphrases to complete the turn.
5. Rotate the outside circle one person (or more) to the left or right.
6. Either direct new partners to share responses or pose a new question. Repeat the process from steps 4 to 6.

Knowledge Building Circle

A Knowledge Building Circle is a class discussion activity that is specifically reserved for working out students’ questions and ideas. The aim of the circle is to help all learners to improve their understandings as students pose questions, postulate theories, and refine ideas. This communal activity deepens students’ understanding through increased exposure to the diverse perspectives of the class. The KBC aligns with the Aboriginal time-honoured tradition of the Talking Circle where individuals take turns sharing ideas.

The goal of a KBC is to have students speak and respond to each other in a conversational manner. It is wise to begin with a talking piece (e.g., stick, rock, microphone) that can be passed to the next speaker so that the circle is not teacher directed; however, over time students can learn to wait for the person who has just spoken to choose the next speaker. Speakers have the right to pass, if necessary.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to sit in a circle facing into the centre and you take your place in the circle as a co-learner.
2. Explain that in a Knowledge Building Circle everyone learns from, and contributes to, each other’s understandings.
3. Establish expectations for behaviour and mutual respect. Students need to listen carefully to the speaker and take turns speaking.
4. Begin by passing a ‘Talking Piece’ or have one student start the discussion and choose the next speaker.

5. Model and facilitate dialogue to help students to internalize the behaviours (e.g., “Does anyone have something to add onto Sam’s idea?” or “Katya, please pass-on to another student.”).
6. Encourage student engagement by asking open-ended questions (e.g., “What do you think you know about our topic? What questions do you have? Did anyone notice/read/find out something that might help us understand our question?”).
7. Support students by asking questions that help them test their ideas and change their theories based on new information (e.g., “What new information did you learn about the topic? How does that information support your theory? Have you changed or added to your theory?”).

*adapted from *Natural Curiosity: A Resource for Teachers*

Paired Interview

The Paired Interview is similar to a Think-Pair-Share activity; however, students must pay close attention to their partner so that they can report back their partner’s ideas in the sharing circle.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to sit facing their partner to conduct a Paired Interview. Each partner will interview the other to find out what they think about the information in the text.
2. In the whole-group discussion, students report back with their partner’s ideas.
3. Remind students to take notes, if necessary, and to use clarifying or probing questions to expand the conversation.
4. Have students sit in a circle formation beside their partner and provide the opportunity for all pairs to share information gained during the interview.
5. Remind students to listen carefully to each other and to build on each other’s comments.

Sharing Circle

A Sharing Circle is a communal activity where students share ideas with the whole class. It is an effective way to allow students to express themselves freely.

Procedure:

1. Have students sit in a circle facing into the centre.
2. Begin by discussing how to be a responsible member of a sharing circle and use a Y-chart to record ideas (e.g., “What should a sharing circle sound like? Look like? Feel like to participate in one?”).
3. Conduct sharing circles in the classroom to discuss current issues, build trust among students, and/or discuss responses to topics or texts. Circles should last from seven to ten minutes, but could be longer if an issue or topic requires more time.

Small-Group Discussions

In small-group discussions, assigning roles to group members encourages co-operation and an opportunity to develop social and communication skills. The successful arrangement of students ensures that individuals are dependent upon one another to achieve a common goal. The responsibility for directing the task and contributing ideas is equally shared.

Procedure:

1. Discuss various roles to be assigned to group members (e.g., manager, recorder, encourager, reporter).
2. Share charts with role assignments and descriptions of each role.
3. Brainstorm comments that students might say to each other while in role.
4. Create small groupings of students (four students per group is optimal).
5. Explain the group task and provide ample time for task completion.
6. Observe students during the group activity and assist groups that are having difficulty.
7. Share examples of effective interaction and encourage students to reflect on the experience.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share is an activity designed so that students can think and share ideas with a partner. It helps to encourage student participation.

Procedure:

1. Pose a question or topic.
2. Allow time for students to think about the question or topic.
3. Have pairs of students exchange ideas.
4. Then have each pair share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Turn and Talk

Turn and Talk is a quick way to encourage thinking and sharing of ideas with a partner.

Procedure:

1. Pose a question or topic.
2. Have students turn to share ideas with an “elbow partner”—a partner who is sitting close by.
3. Promote active listening and effective speaking. You may want to review what “accountable talk” looks like and sounds like, and create an anchor chart similar to the one below.

Accountable Talk...	
Looks Like	Sounds Like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people facing each other• talking one at a time• encouraging by nodding• showing interest by leaning forward• staying on topic• asking questions for clarification• giving the speaker positive feedback• building on the ideas of others• offering opinions in a respectful way• disagreeing in an agreeable way	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• quiet conversation• listening attentively• “I agree with... and I also think...”• waiting patiently for a turn• “I am not sure I understand what you mean. Could you please explain your thinking?”• “Can you show me the evidence for your thinking?”• “I see your line of thinking but I think...”