

The Kindergarten Chronicles

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NEPF Standard 3: Students Engage in Meaning-Making through Discourse and Other Strategies

The core idea of NEPF Standard 3 is that students are active learners who construct understanding for themselves. Although teachers can support learning, no one can learn for students. Students should be active in making meaning by engaging in productive discourse, creating and interpreting multiple modes of representation, and connecting what they are learning to what they already know in order to be independent learners.

Productive Discourse is engaging in dialogue, both oral and written, that is interactive, externalizes thinking, and focuses on creating meaning during learning. In the classroom, oral discourse can take the form of whole group, small group or paired discussion, while written discourse includes anything from argument and exposition to critical review and analysis. In kindergarten, our students need scaffolding in both the oral and written forms. This [link](#) contains an Accountable Talk Toolkit that provides resources, lesson examples, and scaffolds, including response stems that can be used to encourage oral and written discourse in the classroom. Building a safe classroom environment that promotes collaboration is essential. Below are some suggestions for creating a positive collaborative environment, followed by specific cooperative learning strategies.

- **Think-Pair-Share:** A relevant question is posed to the class. Students are first asked to “think” or “write” about the question. They then pair with another student and discuss their answers, ideally coming to a consensus. Finally, one student from each pair shares their answer with the class.
- To add more movement to the Think-Pair-Share, have students **Stand Up, Hand Up, Pair Up**. A question is posed to the class. Students stand-up, make eye contact with another student, raise their right hand, and give their new partner a high five.
- **Pairs Check:** Students work in pairs to practice skills. They may work simultaneously and then check their work together, or one student may “ask” and one may “answer.” They then reverse roles.
- **Inside/Outside Circle:** Students form two concentric circles with the same number of people in each circle. It’s easiest to have students count off by twos and direct the “ones” to stand in a circle. Once they have arranged themselves in a circle, ask them to turn around and face out. Direct the “twos” to face the “ones” creating an outer circle. One circle moves clockwise, the other moves counterclockwise. When the teacher says, “freeze”, both circles stop moving and students pair with the person standing across from them in the other circle. The teacher then directs them to share or discuss with their partner. After the partners have had a chance to finish their discussion, the teacher directs the circles to move again. This strategy can be used in numerous ways:
 - As an icebreaker or team builder, giving questions about personal interests, foods, movies, etc.
 - As a way to activate prior knowledge about a particular topic before holding a large-group discussion or prior to teaching a lesson
 - As a drill-and-practice activity
 - As a review
 - As a listening exercise - Have the inner circle speak first for a minute on a particular topic. The outer circle can’t say anything; they just listen. Then the outer circle summarizes what their partner says. The inner circle gives feedback and they switch roles.
- **Skits:** After a passive learning activity, have the students act out the information, system, process, or skill they just learned. They play inanimate objects or abstract concepts as well as people, animals, and others. With a little creativity, almost any information, skill or process can be acted out.
- **Formations:** This Kagan strategy also incorporates movement. The object of formations is for each cooperative group to create a physical representation of a word, an object, or a process that they have learned. 1) Divide the class into appropriately sized groups, depending on what you are hoping the groups to create. 2) Give each group a slip of paper explaining what they are to represent with their formation. 3) Designate an amount of time to develop the formation. 4) Have groups present their formations to the rest of the class. 5) If the formations are incomplete or unclear, ask the class to offer suggestions that would improve the formation. Some ideas for Formations are as follows:
 - Letters or numbers: Have students form the shape of letters they’re learning.
 - Spelling: Students use their bodies to spell out a term or vocabulary word.
 - Vocabulary: Student form shapes to represent the definition, antonym or synonym of a vocabulary word.
 - Math: Students represent an equation, a math process, or geometric shape.
- If you are interested in a free subscription to the Kagan Online Magazine containing different cooperative structures and teaching tips, click [here](#).



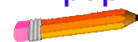
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