**Instructional Strategy: How to set up Partner Talk in Early Childhood**

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Partner talk in an early childhood classroom is a great way to teach students to share their ideas and listen to others. Partner talk can help students build a strong foundation of language and conversational ideas while also having students discuss academic content. Partner talk can be used in large group and whole group settings. It also serves as great way for students to practice communication skills needed during free choice play.

Like all things in early childhood, learning how to talk to a partner is a process and takes lots of repetition and practice. Teachers should consistently model expectations for partner talk and have students model for each other. It is important to hold students accountable for their partner talk by asking partners to share whole group what they discussed. See below for tips on using this strategy in your classroom.

**How to introduce partner talk into the classroom:**

* Begin partner talk with a fun topic! Introduce this concept by giving students a script to follow. For example: *Today you will introduce yourself to your partner. One partner will say, “Good morning, my name is \_\_\_\_\_”, while the other partner is listening. Then the other partner will say “Good morning, my name is \_\_\_\_”, and the first partner will listen*.
* After starting with something simple like name sharing, you can switch to student opinions (favorite color, favorite food, etc). Morning meeting is the perfect time to have students practice sharing opinions through partner talk.
* When students are comfortable sharing opinions with partner talk, begin incorporating partner talk into academic content like read-aloud and small group. For example, pose a question to students about the story like “What do you think will happen next?” and have students partner share.

**Steps to Partner Talk:**

* It is important that teachers go over the expectations for partner talk every time that it is used. Young children are still learning how to communicate and need the consistent reminder of what is expected.
* Follow these steps:
1. Tell students what is about to happen. *We are about to share our thoughts with a partner through partner talk.*
2. Review how to speak to a partner. *When we partner talk, we are sharing our ideas with a partner by speaking and listening. When I am speaking, what should I do? Which voice level should I use? What should my body be doing? What should my eyes be doing? Yes, I should be sitting or standing still. My body should be facing my partner. My eyes should be looking at my partner. I should be speaking in an inside voice.*
3. Review how to listen to a partner. *When we partner talk, we are sharing our ideas with a partner by speaking and listening. When I am listening, what should I do? Which voice level should I use? What should my body be doing? What should my eyes be doing? Yes, I should be sitting or standing still. My body should be facing my partner. My eyes should be looking at my partner. My voice should be off because I am listening to my partner.*
4. The teacher should model partner talk with one student in front of the class.
5. Have 2 students model partner talking in front of the class.
6. Release students to partner talk. The teacher should move around the room listening to students talking.
7. Bring the group back together. Compliment students specifically for what you heard. *I heard so many interesting things today. You and your partner were discussing what you predict will happen next in the story. I heard Kelly tell Aaliyah that she thinks the bunny is going to run away. Aaliyah disagreed with Kelly. She said that the bunny is going to hide. Ahmed and Michael agreed that the bunny was going to tell the truth.*
8. Ask at least 2 groups to share. In the beginning of the year, have students share what they talked about. By the end of the year, ask partner A to tell the group what partner B said and vice versa. This holds students accountable.
	1. Beginning of the year: *Samantha, can you share what you and Cedrick discussed?*
	2. End of the year: *Monica, what did Jalen predict the bunny will do? Jalen, what did Monica predict the bunny will do?*
9. Reward students who followed rules and expectations. This reward is at teacher discretion. Some teachers may use a ticket system, point behavior system, oral praise, stickers, marshmallows, etc.
* Remember, this procedure should happen EVERY TIME you do partner talk. Depending on how often you use partner talk, students will begin to become more independent with these procedures. As with everything in early childhood, more practice and modeling prepares students for future success.

**Identifying Partners:**

* When first beginning partner talk, assign partners. It is recommended to have students turn to a student near them.
* After students are comfortable with partner talk, teachers can choose to allow students to move around and choose a partner through the “high-five method”. *Stand up and find a friend. When you find your partner, give them a high five and sit down facing each other ready to partner talk.*
* If allowing students to choose their partner, it is important to remind students to be respectful of the partner that chooses them using kind words. Some students may become upset if their preferred partner is already with another classmate.