

Classroom Tips from Ron

Give Them Their 80 Tip #1 – Begin With Pairs

A building principal once asked me, "What do I recommend to teachers as a place to start when they want to insert student-to-student conversations into their lesson plans?" I told him to have his teachers begin with paired conversations (seated or standing).

Why begin with pairs, rather than trios or quartets?

1. Students are less inhibited in dialogue mode when they have to deal with a single partner, rather than a larger group.

There is no place to hide in a pair. A single student can become virtually invisible in a quartet or an even larger group, but not if that one partner is relying on his cooperation and support.

2. Students can more easily practice speaking and listening skills in pairs, and teachers can more easily listen in on the conversations.
3. Students get more practice in pairs, for the simple reason that if a teacher has 30 students in the room, there can be 15 conversations going on simultaneously.

I recommend standing pairs at least half the time in the classroom. Almost any conversations that can take place while seated can occur while standing with that same partner or with many different partners over the course of several minutes. Movement sends oxygen and glucose to the brain, and it releases neurotransmitters critical for thought.

The very first few paired conversations should deal with personal topics such as the following:

- What would you do with a 100% free summer day?
- Discuss your favorite movie genres, along with your favorite movies within those categories?
- What is your idea of a perfect week-long vacation?
- Discuss the attributes of a good friend?

Once students feel comfortable having the conversations with different partners, you can work in content-related topics and concepts.

It is also easy to move students from pairs into quartets (sometimes called pairs squared) for various tasks.

So, begin with seated and standing pair shares, then move on from there.