

Individual Learning Experiences

Best Practices	What This Can Look Like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide structured opportunities for metacognition and self-reflection.• Individual learning experiences can be structured within other types of groups; e.g., small group, large group and whole class.• Provide clear directions to encourage independence.• Combine with larger group structures to emphasize collaboration and cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Learning logs” and “journals” are ways for students to track and reflect on their learning. Learning logs focus on more objective details of learning and encourage students to make connections, and practise skills such as predicting, organizing and evaluating. Journals, such as an opinions journal, encourage students to articulate their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about what and how they are learning.• “Interactive notebooks” use a specific notebook format¹ to scaffold student interactions with information and text. On the right page of the notebook, students record notes during lessons, discussions, reading, viewing, group work and research activities. On the left page, they record their individual interactions with the information, including reflecting, processing, making connections, doodling ideas or posing questions. Teachers may provide suggestions but do not direct the content of the left page.• “Agendas” are personalized lists of tasks that students must complete in a specific period of time. Tasks can be assigned, negotiated with students or selected independently. Agendas should include both the task and the directions for completing it.• “Think pad brainstorming” is a strategy for combining independent and group work. Students brainstorm individually on paper before sharing their ideas with a partner, group or whole class.

1. The interactive notebook format was first introduced in the *History Alive* program produced by the Teachers’ Curriculum Institute.



Paired Learning Experiences

Best Practices

- Provide opportunities to develop and practise communication skills, make comparisons and share learning in a non-threatening context.
- Assign partners based on learning needs, interests and preferences.
- Consider when students should work with the same partner or switch partners for different learning contexts.
- Encourage students to reflect and self-assess as a regular part of paired learning experiences.
- Use paired grouping strategies to encourage students to challenge and support each other. Provide students with opportunities for peer teaching and mentoring.
- Use paired grouping structures to introduce, teach and extend use of graphic organizers.

What This Can Look Like

- **“Study buddies”** or **“learning partners”** can be established as a regular part of classroom routines.
- **“Discussion breaks”** are an opportunity for students to discuss ideas, questions and information. Schedule three to five minutes into daily activities. Encourage students to record discussion points in their notebooks to help them stay on task.
- **“Exit cards”** can provide opportunities to have students self-assess and reflect on their partnering activities and discussions by writing on an index card and handing it to the teacher as they leave the classroom.
- **“Mind maps”** or **“bubble maps”** are a good way for partners to synthesize their understandings. Each student records ideas on sticky notes. Then together partners make connections, identify similarities and differences, and represent content by creating pictures and symbols.
- A **“resident expert”** is a student who has received extra instruction in a topic or skill (or has expert knowledge and interest in a topic). Reteaching peers in a partner context can deepen the “resident expert” student’s own knowledge and skills.
- In **“team-pair-solo”**, students complete problems first as a team, then with a partner and finally on their own.
- In **“say and switch”**, partners take turns responding to topics at signaled but unpredictable times. The person listening must pick up from their partner’s train of thought before adding new ideas.

Small Group Learning Experiences

Best Practices

- Make intentional decisions about when and how to organize small groups.
- Structure focused tasks based on content or skill development, learning interests or preferences and readiness levels.
- Consider grouping students based on both similarities and differences. Students benefit from opportunities to work with individuals whose interests and/or learning preferences differ from their own.
- Use cooperative mixed-ability groupings to provide students with opportunities to rehearse information, learn from one another, build individual accountability in a group, engage in a high degree of activity and receive support.
- Build in strategies to ensure that every group member is involved in tasks, including answering questions, solving problems or completing an activity.

What This Can Look Like

- Organize students into small groups for specific and focused instruction on concepts or skills they are experiencing difficulty with. The other students in the classroom can work on independent or paired groupings appropriate to their understanding or skill development. These groupings are fluid and change as student needs change.
- In the “**jigsaw strategy**,” students are organized into groups of four or five. Each student in the group is assigned unique material to learn and then teach to his or her group members. Students working on the same material get together to decide what is important and how to teach it to their small group. After practising in these “expert” groups, the original groups re-form and students teach material to each other. By assigning the same material to those students who are challenged with concepts or skills, you can spend additional, focused time with this group.
- “**Learning centres**” or “**stations**” allow students to work on specific tasks designed to target concept or skill development. Every small group does not necessarily have to complete all tasks at each learning centre. Time spent, tasks completed and degree of choice can vary for each group of students.
- In Spencer Kagan’s “**numbered heads together**” strategy, each group member is given a number. The teacher poses a problem and all group members discuss it. Each group member is accountable for ensuring that every group member can complete the task. The teacher then calls a number and that student is responsible for sharing the group’s solution to the problem.

Small Group Learning Experiences (continued)

What This Can Look Like (continued)

- In “**round robin brainstorming**”, the class is divided into small groups with one person appointed as the recorder. An open-ended question is posed and students are given time to think about answers individually. Then members of the group share responses with one another, going around the circle, one after another, and the recorder writes down the answers of the group members.
- In “**pass a problem**”, the teacher creates problems for teams to solve and writes or attaches them to envelopes. Teams read the problems, place their solution in the envelope and then exchange with another team to check their solutions and to determine if they solved the problems in different ways.
- In “**send a problem**”, one student writes a problem on a card and asks group members to solve the problem. Group members solve the problem and the question writer determines if they have come up with a good solution.
- In “**three stay, one stray**”, three group members work together to solve a problem, while one group member “strays” to another group to compare and discuss their ideas.
- A “**gallery walk**” encourages students to learn from each other in small group settings. Groups record their work on a piece of chart paper. Each group appoints a docent to stay with their work, while the remaining members rotate around examining other groups’ ideas and asking questions of the docents. Members then regroup to discuss and add to their information.
- In a “**visible quiz**”, the teacher poses questions with multiple choice responses and students discuss the responses in a group. At a signal, each group displays its answer written on a large card. A group also can be called upon to explain the group’s reasoning to the rest of the class.

Whole Class Learning Experiences

Best Practices	What This Can Look Like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide students with opportunities to work collaboratively as a whole class. Encourage students to build on each others’ ideas and strengths. This builds a sense of community in the classroom as students learn that everyone has something to contribute.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a cooperative learning strategy such as Kagan’s “board share” to involve student groups in a whole class activity. Each group brainstorms responses related to a question or task. One member of each group is the ‘runner and recorder’ and writes the group’s ideas on the board. The class then discusses and reflects on the whole class effort.

Whole Class Learning Experiences (continued)

Best Practices

- Use cooperative learning strategies to involve smaller groups in a whole class activity.
- Model and teach skills through student interactions with each other.
- Introduce different questioning strategies to help students learn to ask meaningful questions and understand what effective responses can provide.

What This Can Look Like

- **“Think-pair-share”** and **“Think-pair-square”** encourage students to share their learning and thinking processes with the whole class. In think-pair-share, individual students think silently about a question posed by the teacher. Students share thoughts with a partner, then partners share responses with the whole class. In think-pair-square, partners combine into a small group before the whole class discussion.
- In **“carousel brainstorming”**, the teacher posts charts on the wall with key questions or ideas at the top. Groups are formed and one person scribes for the group and adds to the chart as they brainstorm. Groups then rotate to a new chart, read the other groups’ responses and then add to the chart.
- An **“inside/outside circle”** strategy encourages interaction and conversation between all class members. Divide the class in half. One half forms a circle facing outward, the other half finds one person in the circle to stand opposite, so there are two circles of students facing each other. Students discuss a question or topic with the person facing them. On a signal, the outer circle moves one person and the conversation begins again.
- Use a **“three-minute pause”** to stop at any point during an activity and encourage students to review what has been discussed, ask clarifying questions or reflect on their learning.
- A **“socratic seminar”** poses a thoughtful question to students to help them understand ideas, issues and values in their text readings. Students develop questions for classmates in order to dig into a text they all have read. This strategy encourages involvement of all class members, develops critical and creative thinking, emphasizes respect for others and for differing viewpoints, encourages students to support their arguments with textual evidence, and reinforces effective communication skills.