

Structured Student Talk

Research-based Rationale

The Need

English learners need to develop a multi-faceted knowledge of English to be able to communicate effectively in social and academic settings. To develop communicative competence, English learners need daily supported opportunities to use their second language for diverse purposes. Learning English well requires lots and lots of practice.

The Problem

Despite the well understood importance of practice in developing language proficiency, research in both ELD classrooms and general education contexts has revealed that English Learners are very often passive observers during classroom discussions and activities (1, 2). When English Learners do contribute verbally, their comments are typically limited to brief utterances in response to teacher questions. The teacher asks a question, the student responds with a single word or short phrase, and the teacher moves on to the next student.

Small-group and partnering activities also routinely fail to promote substantive oral language growth (3). Merely increasing student interaction without explicit, coached language instruction and accountability for application tends to lead to discussions without richness of language or content (4, 5, 6). Often the only person using complex language is the teacher. That leaves little opportunity for English learners to internalize newly taught language and concepts, deepen understanding, express thinking, and grow ideas.

*Practice is the
best of all
instructors.*

- Publilius Syrus

Some Insights

In an analysis of 77 viable studies focused on the effectiveness of second-language instructional practices, Norris and Ortega (7) identified defining elements of explicit second-language teaching that include 1) directing students' attention to new words, language patterns, or forms, 2) clearly explaining and demonstrating that language feature, and 3) **providing ample meaningful opportunities for use of newly-taught language features with high accountability for application**. Interactive tasks must be carefully structured and clearly require, rather than merely encourage, correct application of the target language (8). When students are given appropriate direction and support, they actively listen and speak to one another, preventing the one-way communication that occurs when the whole class listens to individual volunteers offer their ideas or respond to teacher questions (7, 9).

Citations:

1. Ramirez, J. David. 1992. Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children. *Bilingual Research Journal* 16(1): 1–62.
2. Arreaga-Mayer, Carmen, and Claudia Perdomo-Rivera. 1996. Ecobehavioral analysis of instruction for at-risk language-minority students. *The Elementary School Journal* 96(3) (January): 245–58.
3. Foster, Pauline, and Amy Snyder Ohta. 2005. Negotiation for meaning and peer assistance in second language classrooms. *Applied Linguistics* 26(3) (September): 402–30.
4. Jimenez, Robert, and Russell Gersten. 1999. Lessons and dilemmas derived from the literacy instruction of two Latina/o teachers. *American Educational Research Journal* 36: 265–301.
5. Lee, Okee, and Sandra Fradd. 1996. Interactional patterns of linguistically diverse students and teachers: Insights for promoting science learning. *Linguistics and Education: An International Research Journal* 8: 269–97.
6. Saunders, William, G. O'Brien 2006. *Oral Language*. 2006. In *Educating English Language Learners: A Synthesis of Research Evidence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
7. Norris, John M., and Lourdes Ortega, eds. 2006. *Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pubs.
8. Keck, Casey M., Gina Iberri-Shea, Nicole Tracy-Ventura, and Safary Wa-Mbaleka. 2006. Investigating the empirical link between task-based interaction and acquisition: A meta-analysis. In 6 above 91–131.
9. Lightbown, Patsy, and Nina Spada. 2006. *How languages are learned*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Prepare for Success

The following pages describe a number of strategies teachers can manageably integrate into their daily lessons to **bolster English learner oral language production**.

Structured student interaction **routines** should be incorporated throughout every lesson and include teacher modeling, peer rehearsal, and accountability. We call these task-based student interactive strategies **routines** because when used on a daily basis, they become routine. Students know what to do and can essentially move into “automatic pilot”. This makes it possible to foster student-to-student interaction to accomplish academic tasks using target content and language goals. To ensure productive language use, practice must be well

To learn new language, students need to use it.

Routines for Student Interaction help ensure **each** student practices utilizing new language **multiple** times during **every** lesson.

Student Interaction Routines serve several purposes:

1. Allow teachers to **organize for maximum engagement and accountability**, since students are practicing newly learned language in groups or partners as opposed to responding one by one.
2. **Maximize student engagement** while allowing the teacher **time to monitor** accuracy and provide corrective feedback as needed.
3. Help students **internalize newly learned language** patterns, grammatical forms, and topic vocabulary through multiple opportunities to practice in engaging and supportive settings.
4. Support student use of **increasingly precise and varied language** for interesting purposes.

We all know from experience that simply telling a class of English Learners to “share an idea with a partner” can result in disappointing scenarios ranging from no interaction whatsoever to students investing minimal thought and using limited language (Jimenez & Gersten, 1999; Lee & Fradd, 1996). To plan for success, suggestions follow for how to 1) group wisely, 2) teach the routine, 3) include accountability, and 4) mix it up to keep in fresh

Group Wisely

When the goal is getting students to practice speaking and listening, pairing activities are generally more efficient and effective than larger groupings. Partner activities maximize the amount of classroom language use because, theoretically, half the students are able to talk simultaneously and all students leave class with more “miles on the tongue.” But good partners are conscientious. Discussing it with students helps make it happen.

Ask the Experts - prompts differentiated to four proficiency levels:

What are the characteristics you would like in a lesson partner? What makes a good partner?



Emerging	A good partner is _____ (<i>adjective</i> : helpful, polite, friendly, serious)
Expanding	An effective partner tries to _____ (<i>verb</i> : help __, finish __, listen __)
Expanding	I work more effectively with a partner who _____ (<i>verb +s</i> : listens, participates, assists)
Bridging	I tend to work more productively with a _____ (<i>adjective</i>) partner who __ (<i>verb +s</i>)



Knowing our Students: Successful Partnering to Ensure Participation

Put what you know about your students to good use when establishing partners. Consider content knowledge, language proficiency, and social skills when pairing students. Use the scale to rate your practice, if you wish.

1 2 3	<p>Pair students who have similar levels of English proficiency (e.g., exiting Expanding with Bridging, exiting Emerging with Expanding, etc.), rather than a highly proficient student with one requiring a great deal of support. This prevents the more proficient student from having to lower the level of discourse to accommodate the less fluent speaker or taking on a disproportionate responsibility at the expense of his or her own learning. It also prevents the less proficient speaker from being overwhelmed or silenced. Students at similar proficiency levels are better able to accommodate each other's communication efforts.</p>
1 2 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Pair students who have similar levels of content knowledge. Similar reasoning to above.</p>
1 2 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Take into account personality. Very verbal and confident students may dominate those who are reticent participants. Be sure the partners are balanced enough that each person will have the opportunity to think, listen and speak.</p>
1 2 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Mix the two pairs that comprise the group of four. These groups can be more heterogeneous to elevate the level of discourse for the less capable pair and encourage careful and transparent communication skills of the more proficient and knowledgeable pair.</p>
1 2 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Give students a voice. Have students submit a list of several students with whom they believe they can work effectively. Let them know you will do your best to accommodate their request, if not now, then in the coming months.</p>
1 2 3	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Switch partners periodically to both accommodate student requests and keep it fresh.</p>

Teach the Routine, Include Accountability & Mix it up to Keep it Fresh

Know the purpose and expectations. Be sure students do, too.

Think, Pair, Share

Purpose

Build think time into structured, accountable partner practice (You Do Together).

Materials

A/B Cards, *Language Log* or *Ticket out the Door* (optional for debriefing).

Students will:

- Think quietly
- Turn to and talk softly to a partner
- Take turns speaking & listening
- Signal with partner when finished

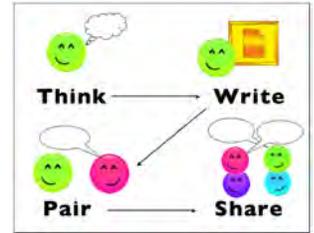
Teachers will:

- Model accurate participation and use
- Allow for think time
- Use signals; pace for lively interaction
- Use name sticks for equitable "Share"

Variations (a beginning list)

- **Group Processing** Each pair of partners does the "Think" portion together and decides on a response together. Then A's share their response with B's, and B's with A's. Then have them switch partners
- **Think, Write, Pair, Share** Add writing to the routine. Before students share, have them write what they are going to say.
- **Partner - Share** During the "Share", have students share what their partner said. This increases student accountability for listening to and processing what their partners say.

Sample script for teaching students *Think, Pair, Share*



Set the purpose

To be sure you get lots of practice using the language we've been learning, today we will use *Think, Pair, Share*. You will have an opportunity to think about what you want to say, tell your partner, and then share.

Teach the routine

First, I will divide the class into groups of four. Each group has two sets of partners. Model by lettering off a sample group: A/B/A/B. Have each group of four letter off. If you are an A, raise your hand, If you are a B raise your hand. [Use A/B cards instead, if you wish.] The A/B sitting next to each other are partners.

Here's how we do *Think, Pair, Share*. I will give you a prompt. Before you say anything, you have time to "think" and plan what you are going to say. Point to the "Think" part of the graphic. When you and your partner nod to each other, that means you are both ready. If you nod and your partner is not ready, wait quietly for the nod.

Now, you "pair". Point to the "Pair" part of the graphic. You tell your partner your sentence (idea): A's will share first and B's will listen. Then B's share and A's will listen. When you are both finished, signal like this to show me you're done. Model the "finished" signal. When everyone is done, I will signal for you to "share". Point to the "Share" part of the graphic. Now you turn to another pair and share what you came up with. [Alternatives for "Share" include pulling name sticks or table numbers for random sharing.]

Invite a student to model it with you. Watch ____ and me try it first. I am A and my partner, ____, is B. Here is the language we are going to practice. Point out that lesson's language structure again. First we hear/read the prompt and think about what we will say. Pause to indicate think time. Because I am A, I'll respond first. Respond correctly. Now it's my partner's turn. Student goes. What did you notice about how we shared? Have students discuss your interactions: thinking silently, taking turns, using inside voices, listening to each other, signaling when finished. Now, we share with our partner pair.

Guided Practice

Now it's everyone's turn to try it. I'm going to walk around and watch while you do *Think, Pair, Share* with your partner. Walk through the process again. Ready? Remember, this is the language structure you use. Point to the display. Before you begin to talk with your partner, think about what you want to say.

Monitor

Watch and listen to students as they share. Record student progress.

Debrief

Call students back together to reflect on what they learned today. Does anyone want to share something they learned about English today? How does playing *Think, Pair, Share* help you? What is something you might still need support with? Take notes and use this information to guide/refine your planning

Taken from *Cue Cards: Routines for Student Interaction* from the *Systematic ELD Support Kit*.

DESCRIPTIONS OF STUDENT INTERACTION ROUTINES

Whole Group	1. Language Pattern Songs
	2. My Turn, Your Turn
Small Group	3. Board Games
	4. Card Games
	5. Numbered Heads Together
	6. Talking Chips
	7. Talking Stick
Partner	8. Clock Appointments
	9. Give One, Get One
	10. Lines of Communication
	11. Structured Role Play
	12. Think – Pair – Share

Language Pattern Songs

Purpose

Whole group language practice to help students internalize language patterns with the support of the rhythm and repetition of singing (I/We Do).

Materials

Chart with song lyrics, possibly with pockets or Velcro for word substitution, *Learning English Songbook* (resource).

Students will:

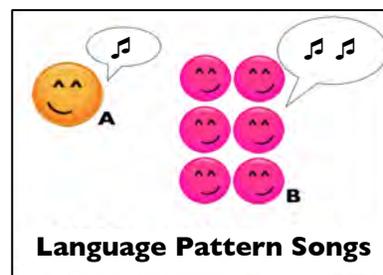
- Practice language by listening to the song, reading the lyrics on the chart, and singing along
- Substitute language to create new verses once they are comfortable with tune and language pattern

Teachers will:

- Prepare visuals
- Model the language pattern and song in small chunks, and lead the singing
- Teach students to make up new verses
- Monitor participation

Variations

- **Mix It Up** – In small groups or partners, students use new vocabulary or patterns to invent new verses.
- **Perform It** – Once students know the song well, invite volunteers to sing for the group.
- **Poems/Chants** – Use this routine with vocabulary-appropriate poems, or change the words to popular chants.



My Turn, Your Turn

Purpose

Whole class practice for students to use target words, phrases, or sentences to chorally respond to a question or prompt from the teacher or student leader (I/We Do).

Materials

Wipe-off sentence strips or chart with language to be practiced, A/B Cards, *Language Log* or *Ticket out Door* (optional).

Students will:

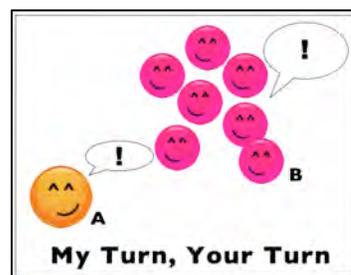
Wait for a signal and answer in unison; use target language when prompted; attend to intonation and pronunciation.

Teachers will:

Model routine with posted language, teach cues for when it is *My Turn* and when it is *Your Turn*, and provide feedback to correct errors in procedure and accuracy.

Variations

- **Echo/Repeat** – Instead of responding to a prompt, students simply repeat what you say. Use for practice pronouncing new sounds or sentence patterns.
- **Group to group** – Mix it up by inviting students to take the lead: One volunteer leading the whole class, one half of the class leading the other, small group to small group, or partner to partner.
- **Add writing** – Have students write down what their “part” will be before repeating it verbally. This allows for written and oral language practice.



Board Games

Purpose

Provide opportunities for small groups to practice language and vocabulary more independently (You Do Together).

Materials

Game boards, dice, markers, word cards, Chart with language to be used, *Language Log* or *Ticket out the Door* (optional).

Students will:

- Roll dice to see whose turn it is
- Complete language pattern(s) correctly using word(s) on drawn card
- Work together to provide each other with feedback and support
- Follow rules to play respectfully

Teachers will:

- Prepare word cards
- Model the interaction during play
- Model generating language using the word cards and sentence patterns

Variations

- **Use Multiple Frames** – As students become more familiar with the routine and the language they are learning, you can take away the support of identifying one sentence frame and have them choose from various frames.
- **Use a spinner** – Instead of using the dice, use the Spinners in your Support Kit to have students practice certain forms more explicitly.



Card Games

Purpose

Practice newly taught vocabulary and language structures; use games with simple rules, such as “Go Fish” (You Do).

Materials

40-50 cards with matching words (two per word); chart with language patterns, *Language Log* or *Ticket out the Door* (optional).

Students will:

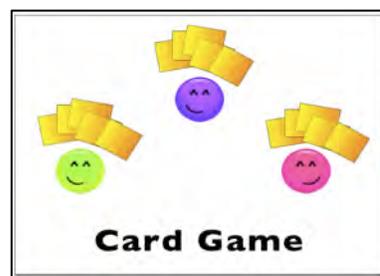
Take turns asking and answering questions using taught language patterns and vocabulary.

Teachers will...

- Prepare the vocabulary cards
- Model the interaction and how to play the game
- Monitor each group for participation and accurate practice

Variations

- **Charades** – One student draws or acts out a card and the others guess what it is. They must use a complete sentence to name the vocabulary word.
- **Category Sort** – Ask students to sort cards in a way that makes sense to them, and explain their rationale, or “category”, to a partner or the table.
- **Concentration**



Numbered Heads Together

Purpose

Practice negotiating language in small groups by generating multiple responses to a prompt (You Do Together).

Materials

Let's Talk folders, Dry Erase markers, *Language Log* or *Ticket out the Door* (optional).

Students will:

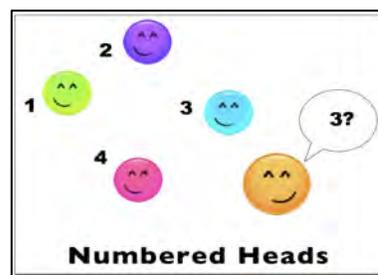
Increase flexibility of language by working in small groups to respond to a prompt in several ways and summarize whole-group responses.

Teachers will:

- Number students in groups
- Model the interaction and language structure(s) to be used
- Allow for think/talk/write time
- Signal group to stop
- Call numbered student to share out

Variations

- **Make Charts** – During brainstorming time, have students chart their ideas. This gives you a record of the group's work and gives students practice organizing language and writing.
- **Change Groups** – Once a number has shared, mix up groups. Call 2's together, number that group 1-4 again, and have them do another prompt. The shuffling keeps students moving and working with more students, which makes the routine feel like a game.



Talking Chips

Purpose

Ensure all group members get equal opportunities for sharing, enhance group communication skills, and provide shared practice of learned language (You Do).

Materials

Talking Chips, sentence strips to display language frames and vocabulary, *Language Log* or *Ticket out the Door* (optional).

Students will:

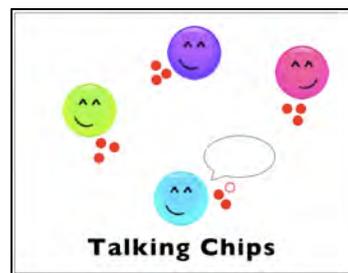
- “Spend” all of their chips to talk
- Take turns
- Listen to each other
- Signal as a group when done

Teachers will:

- Use this only after students have learned sufficient patterns and vocabulary to hold a conversation
- Monitor interaction between students in each group
- Signal group to stop and use *Talking Sticks* for sharing out (optional)

Variations

- **New Frames** Up the rigor by having students change the tense, number, or person. Encourage them to use language in new ways.
- **Add Writing** After oral rehearsal and before *Chips*, have students record ideas



Talking Stick

Purpose

Provide students multiple opportunities to share in small groups, using taught language (You Do Together).

Materials

Objects to use as *Talking Sticks* (one per group), wipe-off sentence strips or chart to display patterns and vocabulary students will use, *Language Log* (optional).

Students will:

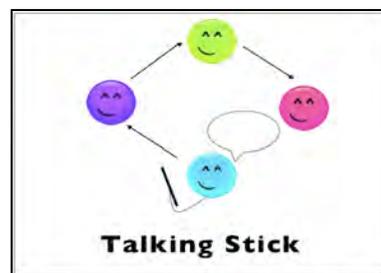
- Speak only when holding *Talking Stick*
- Take turns by passing the *Talking Stick*
- Listen to person with the *Talking Stick*
- Signal as a group when done

Teachers will:

Model the activity using the language taught in ELD lesson; monitor groups for participation and accuracy.

Variations

- **New order** – Allow students to pass the stick in a random direction.
- **Original Thinkers** – Students have to say something that the others haven’t tried. Before they say their own prompt, they have to repeat what the person before them said first.
- **Word Wheel** – Use this routine to practice conjugations or comparatives. Start by giving infinitive or adjective e.g., You say: *I go*, students say: *I went*, *She is going*, etc. or **big**, *bigger*, *biggest*.



Clock Appointments

Purpose

Provide practice interacting with multiple partners and following through on task (You Do Together).

Materials

Clock Appointment Template (to add writing, leave space for notes)



Students will:

- Find four partners and note names
- Take turns speaking & listening. Note ideas from each partner (*optional*)
- Quickly change partners at signal

Teachers will

- Model interaction
- Announce the “times” for partners; signal time to change partners
- Monitor length of interaction and content of student responses

Variations

- **New Subject** Changing the label can keep this routine fresh. Instead of time, consider Season, Type of Music, Place (continent, city, business), Sport, Subject (math, science, literature) - any label with appeal or has to do with what you're learning.
- **Add Writing** Use two-page form with: My Ideas, My Partner's Ideas, I Learned
- **4 Appointments, 4 Prompts** Have one prompt or sentence pattern (frame) allotted to each time, so that each pairing will discuss something different and new.

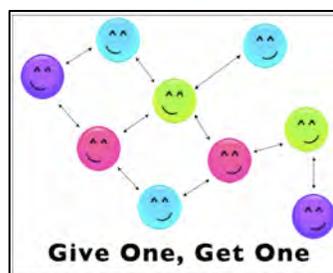
Give One, Get One

Purpose

Consider many responses to a prompt by exchanging information or ideas with several other students (You Do Together).

Materials

Provide *Give One, Get One* template that best fits purpose of interaction.



Students will:

- Independently generate possible responses to a prompt on handout
- Find a partner at the signal
- Take turns listening and speaking
- At signal, thank current partner and find a new partner

Teachers will:

- Model the interaction
- Give wait time to generate responses
- Signal for each new pairing – as many as time and interest allow

Variations

- **Memory for Ideas** – Ask students to meet with 3-4 students and just listen to each one. Afterwards, have them write down all the new ideas they remember.
- **Pair-to-Pair** – Have pairs meet with other pairs, then together summarize the new ideas using target language.
- **Word on the back** – Each student has a word/picture card on their back. Ask and answer questions to identify, then switch card with partner, repeat w/ new partner.

Lines of Communication

Purpose

Provide practice interacting with multiple partner combinations (You Do Together).

Materials

A/B Cards, Language Log or Ticket out the Door (optional).

Students will:

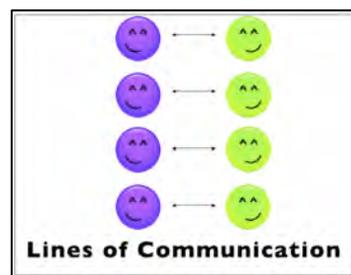
- Line up facing a partner
- Share ideas with each partner
- Take turns speaking & listening
- Change partners at the signal

Teachers will:

- Model the interaction using taught vocabulary and language structures
- Monitor length of each interaction; Signal to change partners
- Monitor participation and accuracy of student responses

Variations

- **Switch Roles** – Before moving the line, have students switch roles by swapping A/B card – and role – with their partner.
- **A/B Tea Party** – Students wander the room, freeze at chime, A's find a B. A prompts, B responds. Then they switch cards, find new partner, and repeat.
- **Word (or Picture) Card Tea Party** – Same as above, but with various cards to use in patterns. Swap with partner.



Structured Role Play

Purpose

Provide opportunities for students to practice taught language by acting out a scenario or reading a script (You Do).

Materials

A prepared script or scenario (on a chart or individual copies for each student), cards with roles, props or realia appropriate for the chosen scenario, Language Log or Ticket out the Door (optional).

Students will:

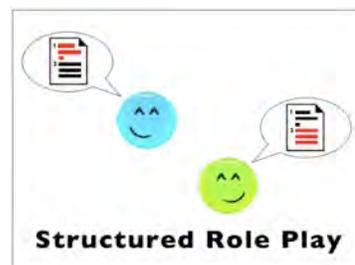
- Assume an assigned role and use the language they have learned to communicate in given scenarios
- Respond according to script
- Change roles at the signal

Teachers will:

- Demonstrate how the role play works and purpose and language to be used
- Signal students to change roles
- Monitor participation and accuracy

Variations

- **Improv** – Allow students to either improvise or create their own scripts to respond to a related situation.
- **Charades** – Have a group of students act out a scene while the others guess and explain the roles and actions. For this variation, props are especially helpful and engaging.



Tips for Successful Structured Language Practice:

Routines for Student Interaction:

- Have snappy pacing that allows for plenty of structured practice without losing instructional time.
- Before the activity begins, make sure the concrete task and sentence starters or frames *require* the students to use the intended sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary.
- Post graphic organizers with sentence starters/frames, content words, and signal words students are expected to use during the activity.
- Invest a bit of time to explain and model the procedure so students know exactly what to do once they are on their own or in partners. (Ex: Model with a small group fishbowl so students can see and hear how it works. Invite a student to read his or her answer to the group to kick things off.)
- Be clear about your expectations. What is the purpose – what will they learn? What should each person do? What would “success” look/sound like?
- Establish clear signals for beginning and ending the activity.
- Circulate and listen closely to monitor for participation and accuracy. Offer support.
- Debrief by recording contributions on a chart. Have students add the most interesting ones to their notes.
- Have students turn in a brief written product (paragraph, note sheet, poster, index card) to ensure individual accountability.
- In a mixed-level group, prepare two response starters: one to appropriately stretch the least proficient English language users, and one for the more proficient students to build upon. Teachers can assign the basic starter to the entire class, and require more adept language users (and/or fast finishers) to prepare an additional response using a second, more advanced starter.

Know Your Purpose: Selecting the right interactive activity for the goal

What is the goal of having students talk to each other during instruction?

Sometimes it is to simply practice something new. Sometimes it's to provide students with practice saying the same thing in different ways. Other time it's allowing students time to reflect on their own learning, on other's people's ideas, or on a multi-faceted, and even nuanced, concept. And finally, your goal may be to collect evidence of student learning to inform your next instructional steps or evaluate student progress.

Similarly, the goals for students writing might be to develop fluency in putting ideas to paper, practice manipulating language to communicate in different ways, collect and process ideas, reflect on a concept or their own learning, or it can be a higher stakes on-demand writing task to demonstrate what they've learned.

Consider the purpose for structuring student interactions:

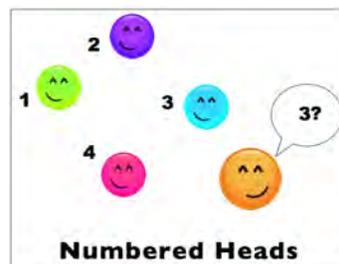
- ◆ Fluency: Getting “miles on the tongue”
- ◆ Flexibility: Putting sentences together in different ways to express the same idea
- ◆ Depth: Supporting conversations to elaborate and grow ideas
- ◆ Shine: Collecting summative assessment data

Small Group Activity – Using Interactive Activities Wisely

Work in groups of four. Together create at least one example of how you would use an interactive routine for each purpose.

For each routine you choose:

- State the purpose you are intending to serve
- Design a prompt that forces students to practice what you intend to teach
- Create several response frames that require students to use the target language



At the sound of the chime, we will come back to share the many ways we can use our routines for student interaction. As your colleagues share-out, jot down ideas you want to hold onto. Remember, knowing how to use strategies purposefully and flexibly is the trademark of a master teacher.