

**From *Explicit Direct Instruction for English Learners*  
by John Hollingsworth and Silvia Ybarra. (Corwin, 2013)**

**Pair-Shares are super important for multiple reasons. Here are fifteen reasons. Each one of them justifies the use of Pair-Shares.**

- 1. Every student orally answers every question.** Pair-Shares go beyond having students think of an answer. Now, all of them are actually saying the answer aloud. Think about it. Every student orally answers every question all day long.
- 2. Automatic wait time is embedded.** The Pair-Share provides the wait time for all students to prepare an answer.
- 3. Listening and Speaking is included.** Pair-Shares are the primary method of including listening and speaking strategies in every lesson. It's especially effective because Pair-Shares before CFU questions include extensive use of academic and content English vocabulary.
- 4. Student Engagement improves.** During Pair-Shares all students are engaged. There are only three whole-class engagement strategies: Pair-Shares, whiteboards, and choral reading.
- 5. Students remember more.** Pair-Share is also a cognitive strategy. As students discuss information they are also facilitating remembering the information.

*From John: I recently taught a demo EDI science lesson at a high school and then three teachers taught the same lesson. After school, the science teachers, the principal, the assistant superintendent, and I, met to discuss the strategies we had practiced. As we sat in a circle of student desks, the principal opened up the discussion. She said, "I talked to the students in the classes you taught today. They said that they especially liked the Pair-Shares. They told me that saying the words and describing the Postulates of the Kinetic Molecular Theory to each other helped them learn."*

**6. Increases the student-talk to teacher-talk ratio.** Consistent use of Pair-Shares adds student talk to the lesson.

**7. Students practice their answers.** During Pair-Share, students, including ELs, are practicing putting together the sentences they are going to use to respond.

**8. Language translation time.** When a beginning English speaker is strategically paired with a student who is able to translate, the Pair-Share provides the mechanism for the translations to occur. The CFU question cues the translator what to talk about.

*From John: I first saw the importance of using Pair-Shares for translations during a demo EDI math lesson I taught. Four teachers were observing in the back of the room. I called on a non-volunteer who turned out to be an EL student giving her first answer in English. In a clear voice, this is exactly what she said, “**Prime factorization is finding all the prime factors you multiply together to get a composite number.**” The teachers’ mouths dropped open. Tears were rolling down cheeks including mine. The teachers rose in unison and gave a standing ovation from the back of the room. When the lesson was over, one of the teachers told me, “John, that’s the first response she has ever made, and you should have seen the look on the partner who had been translating during the pair shares. She had the most encouraging, ‘you can do it look’ in her eyes.”*

**9. Short attention spans occupied.** Teachers have reported how Pair-Shares help students with short attention spans. This is because the frequent talking with a partner breaks up the length of time students must sit quietly listening to the teacher.

**10. Provides first Re-teach.** Pair-Shares provide the first re-teaching during a lesson, and the students do it for you. During Pair-Shares you ask students to explain their answers to each other and to correct any errors. When using whiteboard responses, you direct students to look for errors if they have different answers.

- 11. Classroom Management improves.** Having students Pair-Share improves classroom management as they actively participate in a directed whole-class activity.
- 12. Instruction is more interactive and interesting for the students.** Teachers are often told to be more interactive with their students. Pair-sharing is the number one way of providing student interaction. And lessons are more interesting for students when they do something rather than sit quietly for the entire lesson.
- 13. Academic socialization flourishes.** Students are interacting with each other, speaking in academic English rather than social English.
- 14. Instructional Aides can be utilized.** Pair-Shares provide time for paraprofessionals to help students.
- 15. Reduces affective filter.** Students practice answering questions with one student first before being called upon to answer in front of whole class.

*From John: This past winter I was coaching math teachers in a rural high school. I kept watching the classroom aides at the back of the classroom. Suddenly, I knew what they should be doing. I now tell schools that when Pair-Shares are in place, the aides can have a more focused approach in directly assisting students. Have aides join in during Pair-Shares, cueing students, helping them prepare answers, and re-teaching when necessary. The Pair-Share provides the time for the aide to act without talking over the teacher.*

There are many specific strategies you can use that contribute to effective and successful pair-sharing.

**1. Desk arrangement.** Desks need to be suitably arranged so students have physical access to their pair-share partner. Move the desks if necessary. Most teachers are sliding rows of desks closer together. Also, students need to face the teacher to see the teaching. Don't have student desks in groups of four where they are looking at each other instead of the teacher.

**2. Strategic Pairing.** Group individual students into pairs strategically. When possible, ELs should be paired with a fluent English speaker. Beginning ELs should be paired with a student who can serve as an interpreter. Special needs students should be grouped with a student who is able to provide support. If some students are absent, then immediately move students around so everyone has a partner.

**3. Rotating the pairs.** It's a good idea to form new pair-sharing partners periodically. Many teachers are starting new groups quarterly. This allows students to interact with a broader range of partners.

Classroom discipline problems can often be reduced by changing partners or moving students from the back of the classroom to a seat in the front. Also, it's not a good idea to isolate one student by himself because then he does not benefit from the Pair-Share interaction. Keep all students in partners. If you have an odd number of students then there will be one group of three students.

We have found that when Pair-Shares are used extensively, students will request to move when they don't have a partner.

**4. Label students in the pairs.** When we first started using Pair-Shares extensively, we noticed that some students were dominating the Pair-Shares and others were rarely speaking. To include all students, we assign labels to the students. Most teachers are using "A" partners and "B" partners so they can cue students. The easiest method is to label alternating rows as "A" and "B." During the lesson, you mix up the pair shares with cues such as:

**A** read today's learning objective to **B**.

**B** explain to **A** the definition of a quadrilateral.

**A** first and then **B**, explain how to solve this density problem.

*When you call on students to respond, you can ask questions involving the Pair-Share itself, "What did your partner say about ...?"*

**5. Train students to pairshare.** Invest time in training your students to Pair-Share. In some schools, students have been told to keep quiet so often that they are reluctant to speak to each other, and it takes a while before they fully understand that they are supposed to talk in class during the Pair-Shares.

*From John: I visited a school where the teacher had trained kindergartners to Pair-Share. What happens is amazing. The students sit on the carpet cross-legged facing the teacher attentively listening to her. Suddenly, she gives the command “Sharing Position.” All the students spin 90 degrees on their bottoms to face each other in pairs. She directs them in what to tell their partner. As the students finish, she gives the command “Listening Position.” Every student spins back to face the teacher.*

**6. Provide a cueing signal for students to immediately stop talking and face the teacher.** Classes run more efficiently when you use a consistent signal to call for students’ attention when ending Pair-Shares. There are two types: (1) a teacher-only signal and (2) call-and-respond. Both work. You can also use a sounding device such as a hotel bell, or clicker, or even a door bell. To prepare students to wind up their conversations, include warning signals such as “15 seconds eyes front,” “10 seconds eyes front,” “three, two, one, eyes FRONT.”

**Here is a typical call-and-respond signal.**

Teacher: One, two, three. Eyes on me.

Students: One, two, eyes on you.

*From John: Recently, I taught a class of fourth graders a demo EDI lesson on multiple-meaning words. I paired off the students and used extensive Pair-Shares. Later in the day I saw one of my students with a different teacher that I was coaching. After the teacher asked a question, the student raised his hand and said in a straight forward, matter of fact way, “Teacher, isn’t this about time you should tell us to explain to our partners what this means?” Wow! The students were doing coaching for me. I have seen several examples like this. As students are trained in the practices, little time is spent in directing student behavior.*

Pair-Shares are so powerful that even students attest to how much it helps them in their classes. Below are verbatim student responses from students enrolled in a DataWORKS StepUP Academy where we accelerated English Learners by pre-teaching next year's standards during the summer.

Write a sentence telling how you felt when the teacher asked you to talk to your neighbor or partner:

1. Yes, it helps me [to] talk to my partner because I could think about my answer before giving the answer to the teacher.
2. When my partner tells me the answer, it gives me details and it gets more interesting.
3. I was better prepared to answer questions.
4. It helps me because we put all of our ideas together.
5. Yes it helps me because I could correct the answer with a new answer.
6. It help (sic) me on reading the sentence.
7. It helped me because we worked together so we could learn more.
8. Partner talk helped me to remember what I learned.
9. It helped me not be nervous.
10. Sometimes my neighbor let [me] know if I had the right answer or not.
11. I knew some more stuff that I did not know and I learned more stuff.

*Whew! We spent a lot of time on pair-sharing, but it is very important for English Learners and all other students, too.*

*From Silvia: John and I spend considerable time at schools coaching teachers in the classroom. Cueing and reminding teachers to have students Pair-Share is our most frequent suggestion. This is because it is a new practice for many teachers. Generally, after several hints to Pair-Share, teachers start doing it and Pair-Shares become part of their daily repertoire of teaching tools.*