



TI-AIE

Pair work: life processes

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What this unit is about

Using pair work is a very simple strategy that enables all students, whatever the size of your class, to take part in the lesson. Encouraging students to talk and share their ideas on topics will stimulate their thinking and keep them interested in the work that they are doing. Pair work can be used for a range of purposes and is easy to organise

A key purpose of using pair work is to enable students to talk together about what they are doing and trying to learn. Talking about a problem helps you to clarify the issues and stimulates your thinking to find solutions (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). With a topic like life processes, it is easy for students to talk to each other and share their ideas without being embarrassed or nervous at talking in front of the whole class. Together they can develop their understanding without being humiliated in front of the whole class by giving a 'wrong' answer. Often students have ideas that are not fully developed. By allowing them to talk about their ideas, they can safely explore the confusion they may have about a topic.

This unit explores how pair work can be used to enhance students' abilities to talk to each other more effectively.

What you can learn in this unit

- The advantages of encouraging talk in science.
- Ways of using pair work, including peer assessment.
- Developing your skills in using pair work.

Why this approach is important

Talking and being able to talk is a key dimension to learning in classrooms. Language development and conceptual understanding are deeply linked. Thought requires language and language requires thought, but many teachers do not allow students to talk. If they did, the learning outcomes for their students would be greatly enhanced (Vygotsky, 1978).

In order for students to explore their understanding of scientific concepts (and therefore use scientific terms appropriately), they need opportunities to talk about their ideas and understanding of scientific concepts. To do this, students need help in how to speak and listen to each other effectively. Using pair work to achieve this is a good starting point for younger students because it gives them a safe and supportive context to learn in.

