Guidelines for Supporting a Structured Pair Activity

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Purpose of a Structured Pair Activity

To help students working in pairs coordinate their interactions as they complete an assignment together

Potential for Broader Use

The research underlying these guidelines was conducted with two-person student teams using breakout rooms during the synchronous portion of an online data science course, but the article suggests that the approach could be adapted for use in other settings (such as in-person classes), for projects or courses in a different content area, and for teams with more than two members (Saltz & Heckman, 2020).

Anticipated Student Outcomes

- Improved team collaboration
- Increased individual content knowledge
- Increased shared content knowledge

- Development of an approach to collaboration that can be transferred to future team experiences

Setting

Students using the Structured Pair Activity (SPA) need to be able to 1) communicate synchronously and 2) simultaneously see the product they are creating for the assignment on which they are working.

Procedure

While explaining the assignment, the instructor should do the following with the students:

- State that they will complete the assignment working in pairs, alternating between the roles of "Driver" and "Observer"
- Convey the anticipated outcomes of using the SPA approach
- Explain the roles of "Driver" and "Observer" to the students
- Provide a written script for each role, as follows:

When you are the DRIVER…	When you are the OBSERVER…
Agree with your partner on one tiny goal at a time, something you can complete within a few minutes.	Read what the driver is writing as they write it; evaluate it for accuracy.
State the problem in words.	Your job is to review and think how it fits into the larger picture.
Talk with your partner!	Pay total attention, aiming to let nothing get by you.
Ensure that you both know what you are working on right now.	Think about possible issues and ways to simplify.
Complete the current tiny tasks as quickly as you can.	Bring up issues directly related to the tiny task
Ignore larger issues (but note them out loud).	Wait until the current tiny goal is done to bring up larger issues and ideas for design improvement.
Trust the observer to be your safety net.	Don't dictate—the driver should be actively thinking about how to achieve the current tiny task, not just typing.
	Exploit the fact that you don't need to focus on the details.

(Saltz & Heckman, 2020, pp. 233-234)

- Encourage each pair to actively engage—to share thoughts and ideas and to ask questions
- Team students in pairs

Procedure derived from "Using Structured Pair Activities in a Distributed Online Breakout Room," ©2020 Jeffrey Saltz, Robert Heckman, Online Learning Journal, Online Learning Consortium, used under CC BY 4.0.

Reference

Saltz, J., & Heckman, R. (2020). Using structured pair activities in a distributed online breakout room. *Online Learning, 24*(1). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i1.1632