

## **STAND & TALKS. The best thing I ever did to get students talking to one another.**

by Sara Van Der Werf

This post is my #1 tip for math teachers in 2017-18. It has been the secret to increasing the number of students who talk out loud about math each day in class to nearly 100% – everyday. The best news is anyone can do this. It's easy. Once you start doing this and seeing results you will also be excited to change tasks to increase discourse. This tip has really been amazing in my own practice. I do it every day in my classes now and it has radically changed the amount of discourse in my classroom.

Recently I was sitting at a coffee shop blogging and at the table next to me was a recent education grad doing a practice interview with someone. He was asked to prepare a 4th grade math lesson he needed to teach to those interviewing him. I could not help but listen in to his answers. He was eager, serious and obviously had little experience like all newbies. His answers were full of the things that they teach you in your college ed programs saying words like 'do now', formative assessment, exit tickets and think/pair/share. He said the right things, but his answers were hollow, missing the practicalities of how these things played out in a real class. When he said 'think/pair/share' I inwardly cringed, because I know better now. I use to say I used 'think/pair/share' and/or 'turn & talk' all the time – now I know better and I do better.

I thought I would share with you something that has transformed my classroom culture. It is a small tweak anyone can do A.N.Y.O.N.E. It does not matter how you define yourself as a teacher – traditional, radical, groups, rows.....This tweak is the one thing observers in my room always comment on (in a positive way). "*Sara, how do you get every student to talk?*" "*Sara, I've never seen \_\_\_\_\_ speak in class ever.*" This tweak has made me look good. Seriously, you need to do what I am going to write about every day in your class. Every day. If you work with adults, you need to do this with adults. I started doing this regularly 4 years ago and seriously for the last 2 years and my classroom discourse has changed. I don't recommend this because it will make you look good to observers, **I recommend this because it is best for students and without much effort on your part will change your classroom culture related to student discourse.**

**Let's be honest, this doesn't work as well as leaders claim.**

Think/pair/share (or turn & talks) as an instructional tool has been around for years. You will hear the phrase in most teacher interviews and at teacher conferences. Mentors recommend this move in post-observation meetings. There are things that are amazing about this move. The silent think time removes the stigma that being good at math is being fast at math. It invites so many learners into believing they are mathematicians. Here is where it falls about. We then say as teachers, "Turn to your shoulder partner" and discuss what you were thinking

about. This is what it is suppose to look like. Every student is talking to their partner or group. They all have eye contact with one another. None of them have phones out in their lap texting. Everyone is 100% engaged. i don't know about you, but in my classroom, the only group that looks like this is the one I was standing next to looking at. I always have a few groups that take 2-4 minutes for even one word to come out of their mouths. 2-4 minutes to get started is often way longer than I want to give before we have a class discussion. When I do have a class discussion, I still hear from the same 2-5 students I always hear from.

Note: I do think there are teachers who can pull 'think-pair-share' off successfully all the time. It is way better than doing nothing. It is great for EL students as well as many others. One of my favorite bloggers, Jennifer Gonzalez has a podcast titled "In praise of 'think, pair share'". That said, I still think this one tweak would enhance the best practices she shared.

## THE INSTRUCTIONAL MOVE

I lovingly call this move '**stand & talk**'. If you've been doing think/pair/shares with students already, then this tweak will be easy for you. Basically you give students some private think time (30-120 seconds), have them stand-up and walk across the room to find a partner and share their thinking. It is a smidgen more complicated than this though – because you need to give them something to talk about, something to notice and describe. The success of **stand & talks** is dependent on the work of the teacher prior. I will tell you that in my own experience, other than maybe the first one or two Stand & Talks I've done, it takes the same or less amount of time to do a **S&T** versus a turn and talk and the results are better.

I love doing **stand & talks** because it fits two of the goals I have for my classroom – that students will move at least every 20 minutes everyday and that students will will say (notice and describe) mathematical concepts before I say it for them. I also know talking out-loud engages students brains differently than just sitting and getting information.

**side note:** someday soon I am doing a blog post on ideas for incorporating movement in the secondary math classroom. A small way to give students a 'brain-break' is to have them stand up and walk across the room. An easy best practice (movement) that is rarely seen daily in secondary math classrooms.

Brain breaks should take place before fatigue, boredom, distraction, and inattention set in. Depending on students' ages and focus development, brain break frequency will vary. As a general rule, concentrated study of 10 to 15 minutes for elementary school and 20 to 30 minutes for middle and high school students calls for a three- to five-minute break.

Brain breaks do not require disruption in the flow of learning. Simply stretching, moving to a different part of the room, or singing a song can revitalize the brain.

To help you understand '**stand & talks**' in my classroom I will share with you a script of sorts for doing one, tons of examples of what I ask students to stand and talk about and some tips for implementing them in your classroom. Here we go.....

### **A STAND & TALK IN ACTION (a script)**

When I train teachers on doing **stand & talks** I start by doing one with them & following up with the question, '*What teacher moves did you see me doing during the last 5-10 minutes*' Since this is a blog, I will do my best to replicate this. Here we go...

Note: Depending on what I am using with students, I may or may not give time prior for individual think time – I often do, but not always, it depends on the task.

**Me:** (nothing on my screen) *"Learners, I'd like everyone to stand up. Do not have anything in your hands. No calculators. No notebooks. No phones or pencils. Nothing. (I wait until everyone stands before I give my next directions). In a moment I am going to give you something that I want you to look at with a partner. I want you and your partner to notice at least 10 things on the sheet. I want to hear you asking each other things you wonder about. Look closely at all the details. You will be working with this partner for just a few minutes. You can work with anyone except for the people at your table. Please go now and find your partner, no groups of 3 & I will bring you a 1/2 sheet to look at."*

Notes:

- I give directions after everyone is standing because if I do it when they are sitting they are much slower to get up and find a partner. Later in the year, my beginning directions are much shorter than this, because students know what to do when working with a partner.
- As students find partners I am handing out a 1/2 sheet for them to look at. I like to hand things out myself, because this gets me moving around the room with my students. It also allows me to link up students who do not have a partner – usually I have just a couple of students who don't have a partner right away and usually only because they can't see who is still looking.
- Once I've passed out the 1/2 sheets – this takes me 30 seconds or less, I turn on the same thing they are looking at on my screen. Here is the one I do with teachers (and my students) when I model the procedure for them.
- As partners are working I continue to move around the room, listening in. Often students don't even notice me. I give students usually 60-180 seconds to talk. I rarely comment as they talk to one another. I only intervene if partners are not talking to one another, and this is rare.
- You will hear me announce to the class during this time – if there is a lull things like....

- **Me:** *"I should see you pointing at your card"*
- **Me:** *"I want you to notice at least 10 things"* (hint, use a big # like 10, 15, 20...)
- **Me:** *"What do you wonder?"*
- **Me:** *"Everything on the card is there for a reason, what else do you notice?"*
- I then ask students to take their seats. (note: about 40% of the time I have the next conversation while they are still standing). Students generally do this really quickly.
- **Me:** *"What did you notice? Shout out your noticing and wonderings"*
- In the case of this task Here are typical things my students say.
  - I noticed....there are different colors.
  - I noticed....triangles
  - I noticed....lines
  - I noticed....some lines are dotted and some are solid.
  - I noticed....points
  - I noticed....some points are open and some are filled
  - I noticed....a test point
  - I noticed....a horizontal line at -4
  - I noticed the test point is at the origin
  - I noticed....3 equations
  - I noticed....the equations have less than and greater than symbols
  - I wonder....why some sections are darker.
  - I wonder.... why there is a point inside of the triangle
  - I wonder....why some lines are dotted
  - and so on and so on.....
- During the class discussion, after I started using **Stand & Talks**, I noticed how many more students volunteered to speak – students I'd never heard from before.
- The 2-4 minute **S&T** not only increases the quantity of students that contribute to the class discussion, but it also increases the quality of what they say. I rarely have a **S&T** where not every single student is talking out-loud to their partner.

Read the rest of Sara's blog post at <https://saravanderwerf.com>