

Collaborative Review

Review of material seems to be an essential part of effective learning. Teachers are truly creative thinkers and use many wonderful ways to review. I have seen students play a classroom version of Jeopardy or Survivor. In some classes teams make up quiz questions to be used in a classroom team competition and then some of the questions are actually used on the quiz. Puzzle sheets can be used to keep the process from becoming tedious. One strategy I use is called **Pairs Check With a Switch**. Remember, it should be used to review familiar material.

Pairs Check With a Switch

The purpose of Pairs Check With a Switch is to encourage students to talk together about concepts being learned, to **review** material for a soon-to-be-given test. Sometimes students are hesitant to initiate conversation and will require an appropriate structure, such as this one, which encourages interaction. By using this activity the value of the concepts or problems being discussed is increased and kids are asked to justify the results of their thinking.

This activity requires that students choose partners or sit with partners assigned by the teacher. Each of the partners is designated by a color. One partner could be purple and the other gold.

Two different sheets of questions are prepared, one paper being designated "purple" and the other "gold." The problems on the "purple" sheet should be of the same difficulty and type as those on the "gold" sheet. For example, problem #1 on the purple sheet should be of the same domain as problem #1 on the gold; problem #2 on the purple should be similar to problem #2 on the gold. This pattern should continue throughout the papers. The papers should be constructed in parallel (sample sheets are provided later).

Next to each problem is a small diamond in which a check will be placed if a problem is worked correctly. Putting the Gold problems on one face of a paper and the Purple problems on the back allows students to practice skills at a later time.

When a trio of students is required, a third sheet can be prepared, such as "yellow" or two students in the trio can have the same sheet. When appropriate, the teacher can partner with the third student. The students seem to enjoy the fact that the teacher is doing the activity with them. I have found it advisable that when I do participate, to pick a student partner who is especially skilled with the material being reviewed. This allows me and my partner to finish before the others and for each of us to have the freedom to check and teach the rest of the class.

Procedure: Distribute the papers, asking one partner to turn the Gold side up and the other partner to turn the Purple side up.

When the teacher gives a signal:

1. Each partner works problem #1 on the sheet.
2. The partners signal each other with a nonverbal cue that problem #1 has been completed. (The signal should have been agreed upon before the activity began. Suggested signals—a look, thumbs up, a playing card turned face up.)

I use "the look" in my class because it adds fun to the activity. When explaining the strategy to the class I have the kids practice a look that says "I am finished." It is truly fun!

Remember, learning should be the hardest work and the most fun we ever experience.

3. When both are finished working problem #1, the papers are exchanged and each partner checks the problem worked by the other person. If a problem is perceived as correct, a check should be placed in the box next to the problem. If a problem is perceived as incorrect, the pairs should discuss until the problem is understood and corrected and the box checked. *The person who wrote the incorrect answer should be the one to write the correct answer.* In this case, the student who is checking becomes a teacher. I instruct the students to *lead* their partner to the truth and to refrain from just supplying the correct response. Often I model this behavior prior to the class starting the activity.

After a check is placed in the box, that partner gives exaggerated praise to the partner like, "You are the man," "You are the woman," or "You are awesome," or something similar. I ask the students to practice this before beginning the activity.

4. Do **NOT** exchange papers at this time.
5. Each partner now works problem #2. The Purple partner does #2 on the Gold sheet and the Gold partner does #2 on the Purple. When finished, each gives the other "the look."
6. Exchange papers and follow step 3. Do not forget the exaggerated praise.
7. Continue this procedure until all problems are completed. When a pair has completed the assignment, celebration should occur such as a silent "Strebe High 1." The celebration signals that they are ready to be checked.

Once a pair has completed the sheets, these can be checked using keys provided by the teacher. The teacher can pass out the keys to the finished pair or post several sets of keys in the room. The checked pair can then be used as checkers. They stay together and move around the classroom checking and teaching in the same way they have observed the teacher doing. Be sure that they have totally correct answers prior to checking other students. This pair will often find it necessary to teach.

By the close of the activity, several pairs of students will be checking other pairs. It is advisable for the teacher to have several sets of keys available.

The increased interaction that is generated by this activity deepens students' understanding of the academic subject and allows them to refine their social skills in an

academic environment. The activity is fun for the students. I have had classes do this activity with much energy for over an hour, laughing and learning. I once used this activity for 70 minutes—it took quite a bit of time to create enough questions—to review for a final exam. The students remained engaged for the entire period and the exam grades for two classes were the highest I had ever experienced.

There are reasons for doing the activity in this way. I always have had a student who when given a worksheet will treat my signal to begin as if I had said, "Drivers, start your engines." That student will go "racing" through the sheet, finishing as fast as possible and slamming the pencil on the desk, indicating that a winner had been found. I call that student my "NASCAR Kid." Having students switch papers after each problem causes the students to stop, allowing the opportunity to *reflect* on the question or concept, requiring the students to *review* the concept as checking ensues. Reflection and review are key factors in learning. I do not want to rob even one student of these benefits.

Some of the academic concepts that I know best I learned because I taught someone else. Teaching another person cements the learning, deepens the understanding and increases retention. Having students teach the erring partner benefits both students. A vital component helping students to teach effectively is the observation of their teacher's quality teaching methods.

Someday most of our students will be a spouse or a parent and will perform better in those roles if praise is a perfected skill. After 39 years of marriage, my wife turned to me one day and said, "John, you have become a really good husband." I was glad she did not add, "finally." I kissed her and sincerely asked her if there was anything she needed to be done—anything! I was her man. Praise is powerful! A former principal of mine practiced the habit of visiting classrooms for 10 minutes, not to evaluate, but to observe, to see what was going on in the school. Later, after visiting my room he would find me and say something like, "Thanks for what you did today. We are blessed to have you in our school." I planned that night and came to school the next day with increased enthusiasm and energy—deserved, specific praise is effective!

Many of my students do not know how to praise because they have not experienced sufficient praise from those who should praise them—their parents, and embarrassingly for me, some of their teachers. **Pairs Check With a Switch** gives students the opportunity to practice and experience praise. They do a better job of this if they see it first modeled by me. The more kids praise each other, the better they get at praising. One day after doing this activity for about an hour in a freshman class, Shannon turned to her partner and said, "Tomika, your Momma did a good thing!" The class and I rolled with laughter as we realized the great thing her mother did was to have Tomika. Students enjoy doing this and I will hear from kids a request to do "that switch thing."

Some students have a strong desire to be a "NASCAR Kid," and in other classes they have been allowed, even trained to race through a review sheet. I always carry several blank sheets as I roam the classroom so I can collect and replace sheets when students have not switched, checked and reflected. I simply remind the students about why we are doing the activity and let them begin again.

The kids like to tell me I tricked them because they did twice as many problems as they had anticipated. Each student did every problem on both sheets. They are correct, but then they tell me how much fun it was to do.

Some Suggestions

When doing this activity for the first time, it may be necessary to keep the class together taking them through the activity step by step until they fully understand. With subsequent uses of Pairs Check With a Switch students will gain expertise and work independently.

A student who has missed class should be paired with a student who can teach using the purple and gold sheets. The teaching student could do #1 on the purple sheet and the returning student could demonstrate understanding by doing #1 on the gold sheet. This process could continue until all the questions were answered. After a period of time, the student who has returned from an absence may begin to understand the material and the activity can be finished from that point using the Pairs Check With a Switch procedure.

In some classes, especially with younger students, create the initial purple and gold sheets to be shorter with perhaps no more than five questions or examples to be considered.

Use this activity with all types of questions, not just short answer ones. In some classes the purple and gold sheets could have identical content. For example, in a literature class studying *Death of a Salesman*, question #1 on the purple and #1 on the gold could be something like, "Willy Loman planted a garden just prior to committing suicide. What could have been his purpose?" Each student may write a paragraph answer in explanation of Willy's motives. Each student could have written a valid response. After switching papers the reading and discussion of the different answers could result in a deepening of understanding for both students.

Several examples of Pairs Check With a Switch sheets are included here. Be creative and begin a file of sheets for your subject matter. In a few years you can have a substantial library of Pairs Check With a Switch sheets.