

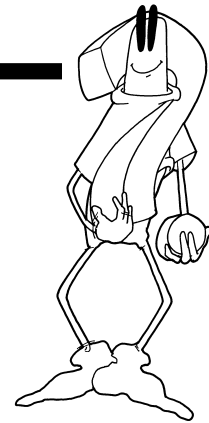
Advanced
**Cooperative
Learning**
Playing with Elements

Miguel Kagan & Dr Spencer Kagan

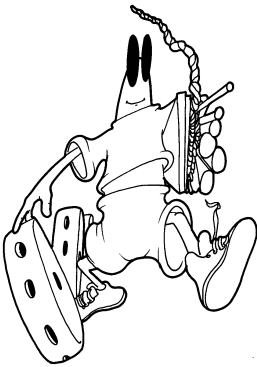


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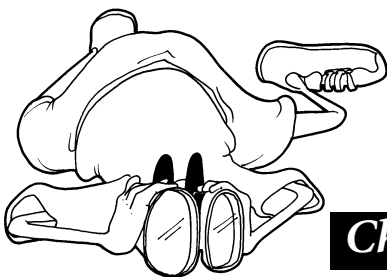
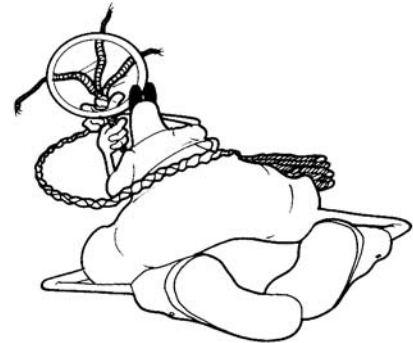


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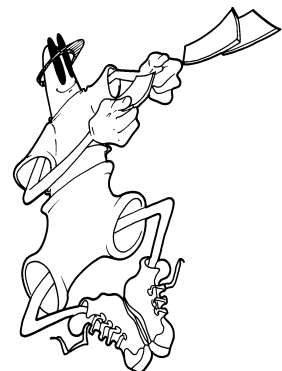


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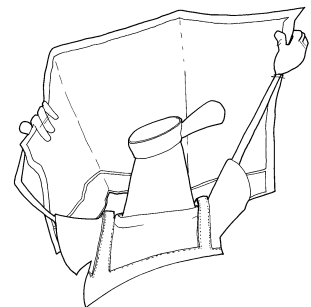


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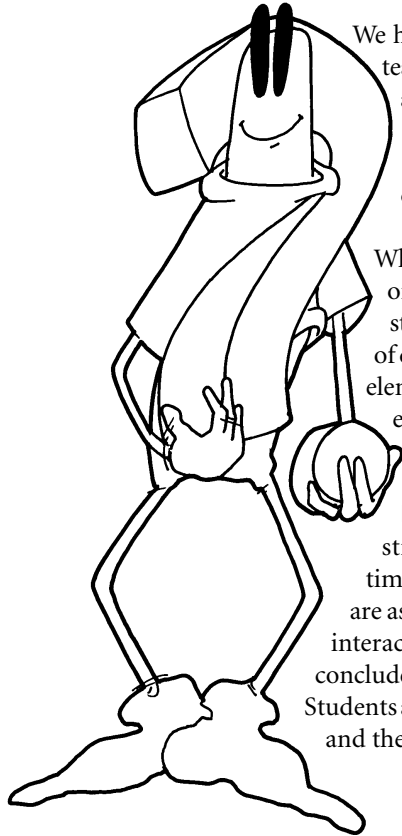
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Chapter 1

Why Play with Elements?



We had used a **Think-Pair-Share** in our teaching a hundred times before we asked ourselves what is a **Think-Pair-Share**, really? This book is about what happens when you ask that question.

When you analyse a **Think-Pair-Share** or any other cooperative learning structure, it turns out that it consists of distinct elements and each of those elements in turn always consist of either two or three components.

Let's look more closely at a **Think-Pair-Share**. In the first step of the structure, students are provided time to think about a question. They are asked not to talk with each other or interact. If we analyse this element, we conclude it consists of *Actors* and an *Action*: Students alone as *Individuals* are the *Actors*, and the *Action* is *Thinking*.

Having played with the elements you are a storehouse of possibilities, and know which possibility will work to reach a given goal.

In the next step of **Think-Pair-Share**, students are asked to talk over their thoughts with a partner. In this element, the *Actor* is a *Pair*, and the *Action* is *Discussion*.

In the final step, individual students are asked to share either their own answer or the answer they heard from their partner. The *Actor* again is an *Individual*, and the *Action* is *Sharing*. In this final element, there is a third component, a *Recipient*. The *Recipients* of the *Action* are always individuals other than the *Actors* themselves. Classmates and the *Teacher* are the *Recipients* of the *Sharing*. Why bother being so analytic? Why break down structures into elements, and then further analyse the elements into their com-

ponents, *Actors*, *Actions* and *Recipients*? Why play with elements?

There are many answers to this question. Let us furnish a few:

• Making Structures Our Own

After we play with elements for awhile, we get fluent at the element level. We no longer think of a **Send-A-Problem** or a **Numbered Heads Together** as just a structure, but rather as a series of elements. Once this happens, an amazing number of possibilities open up. We are free to play with the elements of any structure as we teach, and by playing with elements, structures become our own.

If students are not participating equally, or they are getting off task, it becomes very easy to "patch-up" our teaching on the fly as we can modify our structures by inserting or substituting elements to accomplish specific goals in the moment.

For example, if you have played with elements and have looked at how the elements relate to the basic principles of cooperative learning, when you find one student in a pair doing most or all the talking you know the problem is related to the lack of individual accountability in the element *Pairs Discuss*, and with no effort, you substitute for the *Pairs Discuss* two rounds of *Individuals Share with Partners*, and the problem is fixed.

Or perhaps you may be having troubles with **Numbered Heads Together**. You are well aware of the benefits of **Numbered Heads Together** over whole-class question and answer, but there seems to be a problem. During "Heads Together" as students discuss the question asked, in one team one student blurts out an answer and that is the end of the discussion. Having played with elements, you can modify this structure to make it work for you. After you ask the question, you insert *Individuals Think*, *Individuals Write*

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and four *Individual Shares with Teammates* (**Roundrobin**). Problem solved. Every student has now participated and no one is blurting out answers or dominating the group.

• Capturing the Teachable Moment

You are in the middle step of a **Think-Pair-Square**. As you stand by a pair discussing the question, you hear an idea you want the whole class to respond to. Without thinking, you raise your hand and give the quiet signal and then say, “Mark just came up with an idea I want each of you to think about.” You have Mark share his idea with the class (*Individual Shares with Class*). Then, after calling for a think time (*Individuals Think*), you have students take out a slip of paper and write their response (*Individuals Write*) to Mark’s idea. Next, students do a **Roundrobin**, reading their responses. Finally, students do a **Roundtable** chart of what was positive, negative and interesting about the idea. None of this was in your lesson plan, but the idea was too good to pass up. By using elements you were able to capture the teachable moment.

The **Think-Pair-Square** never got to the third step. In fact, without planning or effort, you just did a **Think-Pair-Share-Think-Write-Roundrobin-Roundtable!** And the students in your classroom are far more excited about

learning than if you had stuck with the tired

Think-Pair-Square you had set out to do. And you are far more excited about teaching! By working at the element level, we capture the teachable moment; teaching and learning become spontaneous and exciting.

• Variety; Expanding our Repertoire

If we use one structure, let’s say, **Think-Pair-Square**, very often, each time we say “Think” and then “Pair”, the students know “Square” is coming. Anything which is predictable becomes boring, and class tone is diminished. If we play

with elements, then following “Think” and “Pair” we might call for “Write”, or “Mix”, or “Paraphrase”, or “Question”, or any number of other possible elements or sequences of elements. The class tone is enhanced, students are always alert and attentive – not quite sure what is coming next.

• Classroom Management

The class has become too noisy. You insert a “Think” followed by a “Write” and you and your students enjoy some quiet time.

The students have become bored. Suddenly you insert a “Mix, Freeze, Form Groups of Three, Roundrobin”, and quickly the whole class tone is transformed — students are all excited and involved.

In the middle of a team discussion, the students have gotten off task. You insert a “Think-Rallytable”, and they are all back on task.

Having played with the elements you are a storehouse of possibilities, and know which possibility will work to reach a given goal.

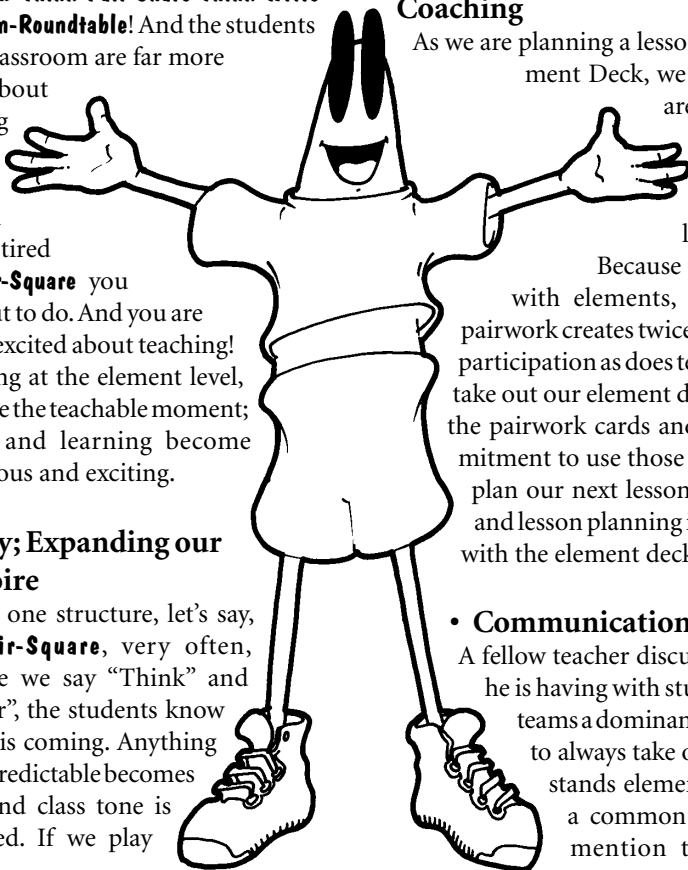
• Lesson Planning and Self-Coaching

As we are planning a lesson with our Element Deck, we realise that we are planning a lot of teamwork in our classroom, but little pairwork.

Because we have played with elements, we know that pairwork creates twice as much active participation as does teamwork, so we take out our element deck, spread out the pairwork cards and make a commitment to use those elements as we plan our next lesson. Self-coaching and lesson planning is fun as we play with the element deck.

• Communication

A fellow teacher discusses a problem he is having with students: in some teams a dominant student seems to always take over. He understands elements, so you talk a common language. You mention the possibility

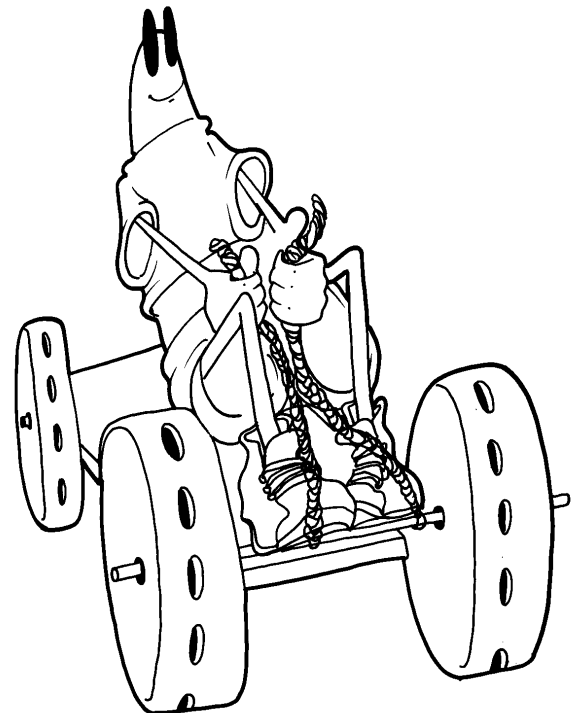


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of beginning each **Team Discussion** with a randomly called *Individuals Share with Team-mates*. He immediately knows what you are suggesting and why, and returns to his class to fix the problem.

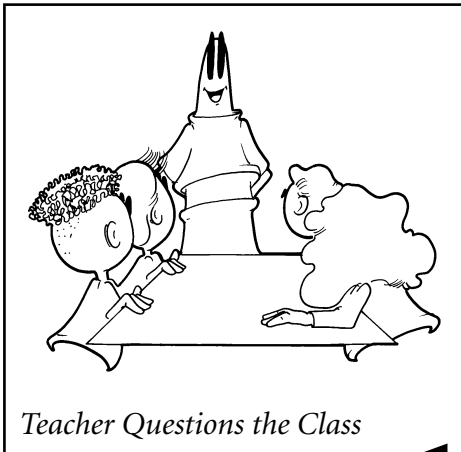
- **Joy**

As we play with elements, we find ourselves inventing new structures as we teach, experimenting, creating. We have fun with our students. Teaching becomes what we always thought it would be — an opportunity to create stimulating and challenging learning experiences for our pupils. As we play with elements we find something which may become hidden under preset, tired lesson plans — spontaneity and a renewed joy in teaching.



Inserting Elements

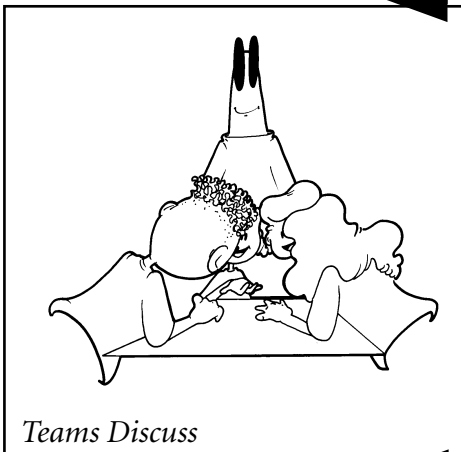
Inserting *Individuals Write* in **Numbered Heads Together**



If you insert *Individuals Write* here,

- What would you have them write?

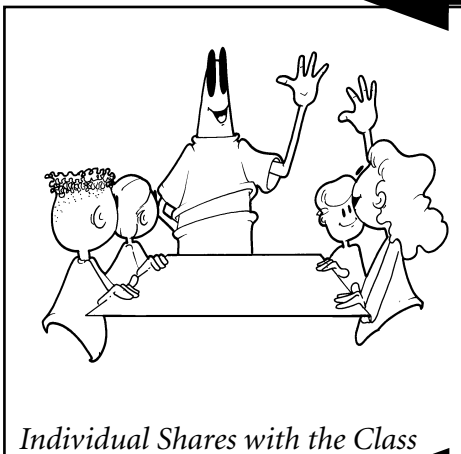
- What would be the gains of *Individuals Write* here?



If you insert *Individuals Write* here,

- What would you have them write?

- What would be the gains of *Individuals Write* here?



If you insert *Individuals Write* here,

- What would you have them write?

- What would be the gains of *Individuals Write* here?
