



### THE IDEA: BRAINSTORMING REVISITED!

We have all tried brainstorming in our classes at various times. It is probably a staple in many of our teaching repertoires. However, here are some variations that might be new and different or might remind you of strategies that you have tried before but let go for some reason.

#### Carousel Brainstorming

In this structure the class is arranged in teams of four to six. Questions or prompts are placed around the room on large poster paper with one question per sheet. Students are asked to stand in front of one of the poster sheets and when the signal is given, to answer the question with as many answers as they can think of. After two minutes the team rotates to the next station and writes as many new answers as they can to add to what is already on the sheet.

#### Stepladder Brainstorming

The Stepladder Technique has five basic steps. Here's how it works.

**Step 1:** Present the task or problem to all members of the class. Give everyone sufficient time to think about what needs to be done and to form their own opinions on how to best accomplish the task or solve the problem.

**Step 2:** Form teams of five within the class. Within these teams, form a core group of two members. Have them discuss the problem.

**Step 3:** Add a third group member to the core group. The third member presents ideas to the first two members BEFORE hearing the ideas that have already been discussed. After all three members have laid out their solutions and ideas, they discuss their options together.

**Step 4:** Repeat the same process by adding a fourth member, and a fifth, to the group. Allow time for discussion after each additional member has presented his or her ideas.

**Step 5:** Reach a final decision only after all members have been brought in and presented their ideas.

**The Carousel may be good for Connecting to Prior Knowledge while Stepladder is good for decision making.**



Boys at Work!

Dear Colleagues!

This is the first in a series of newsletters designed to provide some quick and easy ideas to use when planning to incorporate successful strategies for teaching boys in our schools.

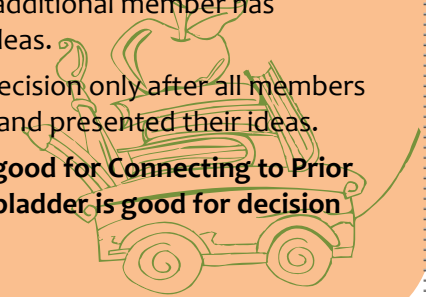
Why do we need this?

At TA last year the only students who failed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test were boys. This year on the practice test, more boys were unsuccessful than girls. As well, in prior schooling boys have not fared well in the EQAO testing done in grade six and grade three. We have a trend that shows that boys are not doing as well as girls are doing.

There are some things that have been established in the literature about how boys learn. For example, Dr. William Pollack, in *Real Boys* tells us that:

Boys have a unique learning style that is different from that of girls. Research suggests that, whereas many girls may prefer to learn by watching or listening, boys generally prefer to learn by doing, by engaging in some action-oriented task.

This is not big news, but it may help us to shape our classrooms in a different way that may provide boys with more success.



## WHY WE SHOULD TRY IT

Our students want to feel cared about and that their opinions and ideas matter. When we ask students why they come to school it is never about the curriculum, their answers are always about being with their friends. Why not tie in to that need to be social and make it a part of the learning? In Carousel brainstorming, students are able to work together and to build their knowledge in groups. There is “safety in numbers” plus the activity involves getting up and moving about the room. In the Stepladder technique students are able to work alone and then in pairs to communicate their understanding of an issue. They build good communication skills and consensus and social skills by working together and adding ideas as they go. This is a great way to encourage students to build independence as well as critical and creative thinking skills.

## WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CLASS

Carousel brainstorming might be used in the following situations:

Building Vocabulary (*Write down words that might be used in an article about \_\_\_\_.*)

Checking Prior Knowledge (*What do you know about \_\_\_\_\_?*)

Building Group Knowledge (*List the names of people who have contributed to our knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_.*)

Build Fluency of Thinking (*Any question that asks students to list as many words as possible or identify multiple things related to a topic, etc.*)

Stepladder Technique might be used in these situations:

Problem Solving

Group Decision Making

The beauty of this structure is that everyone gets to have their say without getting “stepped on” by the louder or more aggressive members of a group. There is individual and group accountability while giving the group the chance to learn from one another.



## Related Ideas:

*What can you do to encourage more talk (and more engagement) from boys?*

**Model** and encourage the use of purposeful, accountable talk.

Allow talk to **scaffold** reading and writing activities and responses.

Use talk to build **social interactive networks** and a sense of community in the classroom.

Use well-formulated **questions** that require oral responses that are more than simple one-word or yes-no answers to **deepen understanding**.

**Monitor the ratio of teacher talk** versus student talk to ensure as much of the latter as possible.

