

CLASSROOM TEACHING STRATEGIES

INCREASING AND MAINTAINING ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Hand and Finger Signals

- Allows students a consistent way of responding to the teacher or other students
- Allows the flow of the instruction to continue
- Allows ALL students to participate without distracting from the lesson
- Encourages students to listen to each other and stay focused during discussions

Examples:

- **Agree** – thumbs up
- **Disagree or I have a different answer** – hands waved across each other
- **“I don’t know” or “I am confused”** – hand moving back and forth over head
- **“I can’t hear”** – hand behind ear

Space

The teacher uses the full space of the room to facilitate the active involvement of as many students as possible. As the teacher moves through the “whole class” part of the lesson, the teacher moves to various parts of the room. The goal is to use space to bring about desired behaviors such as on task behavior (teacher moves in closer), require louder speech from responding student (teacher moves to the other side of the room, hand behind ear), increased participation (teacher stands in back, rather than next to the student, the student then presents at overhead or board).

Benefits:

- Each student has the same amount of close contact with the teacher
- Re-engage uninvolved students
- Enables the teacher to assess the class from a different perspective
- Less likely that a student is able to “hide” in the back of the room
- Less likely for two or more students to carry on a side conversation
- Allows all students to hear and learn from one another

Modes of Response

If a Mode of Response (MOR) is given before a question is asked, students will not have to guess how they should respond. When no MOR is given, some students will call out an answer while other students are still trying to think. By always using a MOR BEFORE posing the question, the teacher creates a safe situation in which all students may respond. When MOR is not one student answering, all listening, higher engaged learning can occur.

Examples:

- I'll take a quiet hand...
- Show me on your fingers...
- Whisper to your neighbor...
- Talk it over in your group...
- If you can hear my voice... (raise your hand, tap the desk, clap 3 times, etc.)
- Think-Write-Pair-Share-Share Again-Share Again
 - Ask a question, or give a task such as: list characteristics of the South at the time of the Civil War on the left side of the paper, and of the North on the right side
 - Think before you write! (give Think cue, then follow it with Write signal)
 - Write in bullets for 5 minutes—go!
 - Combine your list with your partner
 - Your dyad has 3 minutes to combine lists with a pre-assigned second dyad
 - Your work group (4 students) prepares for 10 minutes to share with a second work group
 - Your work group shares with another workgroup and the list is flushed out, refined and combined in accordance with a model the teacher has presented on a different topic.
 - The class presents their summaries to another class (and competition and voting on best summaries can occur)

Positive Reinforcement of Behavior

The key to management is CONSISTENCY. The teacher needs to clearly state what it is he or she wants and acknowledge only those that act accordingly. As students recognize that they will not be acknowledged when shouting out, the undesirable behavior will diminish.

Examples:

- “Table 4 is looking at the overhead and is ready to listen.” (Teacher can add: 1 point for responsible behavior!)
- When child shouts out, respond with: “I am looking for a quiet hand.”
- “Most of the people at table 2 are sitting quietly with their pencils down.” (2 seconds and we will all be ready! (Teacher can add: 1 point when all comply)

Try to avoid comments like “I like the way.....” This focuses on what the teacher likes not on the desired behavior.

Positive Reinforcement of Incorrect Answers

It could be said that there are no wrong answers; we just have to find the question the student answered. An acknowledgement of a student's contribution to a class discussion invites involvement and creates a safe environment for students to share their thinking. If a student responds with an incorrect answer and students are giving the signal of disagreement, the teacher might say,

- “That would be correct if...but I’m looking for...” Give the student some wait time to rethink and offer a new response.
- “Talk with your neighbor about how someone **might** get ____.” After the group/class discussion, the teacher can still come back and acknowledge when that answer would have been correct.

Circulation

After the students are given a task to work on in groups or independently, the teacher moves among students, looking and listening, asking questions to find out about student thinking, extend thinking, or give hints. This provides a quick assessment and often the chance to intervene on the spot. Circulation also serves as a tool for managing behavior. While circulating, the teacher’s proximity prompts students to stay on-task.

Wait Time

After asking a question, the teacher waits 3-5 seconds before calling on a student to respond or before asking a follow-up question. Wait Time allows students time to digest a question and think through an answer. Research shows that more students will participate if given time. Use hand signals to communicate you are waiting (e.g., hands up, palms open) and to communicate you are ready for the response (e.g., hands down, palms closed).

No Echo

If a teacher repeats everything a child says, students will know that they don’t have to listen to each other because the teacher will repeat it. A great deal of rich dialogue among students is lost and students are likely to have a more difficult time working in groups because they are not in the habit of respecting what each person has to say.

Why do we echo?

- habit
- the students spoke to softly
- want to reinforce the correct answer
- validate student

Alternatives to Echoing

- ask for signals
- “Wait, let me get across the room so I can hear you better.” Or “Can someone repeat what _____ said?” then ask for signals.

Specific Questions

It would be ideal if students never had to guess at what a teacher was asking, yet often, teachers ask questions which are vague, but in the teacher's mind require a specific answer. Questions should be phrased carefully. If you want a specific answer, ask a specific question. You know you have not asked a specific question when you were expecting a particular answer, but students come up with justifiable reasons for getting a different answer. If a question is inadvertently open to interpretation, student thinking needs to be honored, even if the answer is not the one expected. There are times when open-ended questions should be asked, but you must be aware of the difference between these types of questions (multiple answers) and "specific questions" (one answer).

Deliberate Mistakes vs. Exposing Non-Examples

Mistakes/mistakes

This technique sets a positive tone in the classroom, telling your students that it is okay to take risks and make mistakes. The key is to make the "deliberate mistakes" obvious at first and in the areas where students commonly make mistakes. **DO NOT** use this technique with a concept that is being introduced. Students might learn the mistake instead of the correct information.

Listen carefully to the students' corrections to the mistake to gather feedback about their level of confidence with the content. Also, if you follow the directions the students provide to correct the mistake, you model for the students the expected behavior for when they are corrected. (E.g., $6 \times 5 = 32$ written on the board when multiplication facts are well known. "Excuse me Mr. Peters. I think you meant to say $8 \times 4 = 32$." This might be a student response as a correction to your "Mistake".)

Exposing Non-Examples

Discriminate occurs when students are shown models of the work you wish completed. Clearly contrasting an "example" with a labeled "non-example" can help in this process. (Be sure any non-examples are not those of any current or even a past student that can be identified by the students.)

- Boys and girls, short a says "ahh." What does it say? Choral response: ahh.
 - Is this short a? Say: A (No! That is not short a. Short a says what, boys and girls? Choral response: ahh)
- "Students, one of these headings is correct, one of these headings is a non-example. Find the non-example!"
- "Ladies and gentlemen, one of these examples is an exemplar report, one is adequate and one is inadequate. Please examine and determine which report fits which category and why."

Involvement of Visitors

What happens when the door to the classroom opens and a visitor enters?

The students' eyes and attention go to the door, disrupting the lesson.

In order to reduce the distraction of the arrival of a visitor in the classroom, the teacher can manage and re-engage the students in the learning environment by asking the visitor to become part of the engagement and assigning them some task that does not put them on the spot. Students come to see visitors as part of the classroom experience.

“Mr. Smith, would you call on a quiet hand for the answer? Marten has a quiet hand, Judy has a quiet hand...”

“Mrs. Dean, would you visit these two groups and see if there are any strategies for solving the problem that interest you and I will be right with you?”