



Teaching Threads

Increasing Student Engagement and Checking for Understanding

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Every teacher knows that the more time students spend truly engaged in the learning process, the more students learn. Teachers also know that they need to continually check for student comprehension as instructional lessons progress, from one concept or skill to the next. Here is a set of strategies for teachers to use during instructional lessons to increase student engagement and check for student understanding.

Mini-Lectures

Divide lecture time into short sections of 5 to 10 minutes. When teaching elementary students, use 3 to 5 minute mini-lectures; with high school students use 10 to 15 minutes mini-lectures. Stop after each section and require some form of student interaction or response. This can involve oral responses - "Turn to your study partner and give them three examples of . . .", or written responses - "In your notes answer this question . . ." Varying the type of response will also increase student engagement.

Response Cards.

During each class period, students are given a response card. Throughout the lesson, the teacher asks students to respond to various types of questions. Correct answers are given immediately and these cards are kept by students as supplements to their class notes. Suggestions for questions for response cards include:

- Write a definition of...
- Give another example of...
- Give a non-example of...
- Write a good test question for the topic of...
- How would you determine the best way to...
- What advice would you give...
- Imagine two reasons why...

What-do-you-know?

Students are asked "What-do-you-know-about..." Responses can be shared with a

neighbor, or written on response cards or in the margins of notebook pages. What do you know question can be asked several times during the lesson when a new topic or detail is introduced.

Mini-Chalkboards.

Provide each student with a mini-chalkboard or white boards and throughout lesson have them write words, perform math problems, etc., on their boards and hold up their responses. One elementary teacher used white boards as the students sat in a circle on the floor. They all sat on their boards when listening to the teacher.

VCCC

This strategy, as presented by Skinner, Ford, & Yunker (1991), requires students to Verbalize, Cover, Copy, and Compare. After having students write a definition in their notebooks, ask them to verbalize it, cover it, and copy or rewrite it. Students compare their rewrites with the original definition.

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down.

During the lesson students are asked questions that can be answered with a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down". Suggested questions include: "Is the correct answer . . ."; "Would that be the best way to . . ."; "Given this information, would it be correct to conclude . . ."; or "Do you agree or disagree with this statement."

Let's Vote.

Similarly to Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, students are asked questions that can be answered with a hand raise. Requiring students to put their heads down before voting reduces student temptation to look around to see how others are voting.

Game Show.

At various times throughout the lesson, have students work with their neighbors to

write a “Jeopardy” or “Millionaire” type question with its answer over the material just covered. These questions can be written on index cards (questions and answers on the same side of the card) and ready to use during the game show review game. The questions can also be posted on the bulletin board for student review prior to the test.

Name Cards.

Teachers can create name cards for each student to be used during class when calling on students. Cards can be cut 1 inch by 3 inches so they can be easily held in the palm of the hand. Cards are shuffled several times during the class so that students are called on randomly and possibly more than once during the same class. If name cards are used so that students are called on only once each class period, students will relax their attention after they have answered their question for the day.

Teach Your Neighbor.

Students are asked to work in pairs, take turns being the teacher, and teach their peer the skill or information just taught by the teacher. This can be completed in a few minutes.

Reduce Seatwork.

When comparing seatwork versus teacher directed activities, research has found higher levels of student engagement and fewer incidences of disruptive behavior during teacher led instructional activities versus independent seatwork. Therefore, teachers should devote the majority of class time to teacher directed activities.

Proximity Control.

As teachers move around the classroom during instruction, student engagement increases. This also enables teachers to monitor student work, understanding, and task completion throughout the class period. Teachers who continually circulate the classroom are also able to provide assistance to students who may be hesitant to ask for it.

Rovin' Eyes.

Teachers can improve their withitness and monitoring of students by with roving eyes. Teachers should position themselves so that they can quickly scan the classroom, doing so approximately every minute. This will enable teachers to observe quizzical looks, troubled foreheads, and relaxed postures as students work.

As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question -

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?



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