

Questioning in a Thinking Classroom

Roundtable Discussion with Peter

Launching the task:

- Give the task and head to the middle of the room. Stay away for 2 - 3 minutes.
- It's a waste of time to walk around the room, asking groups if they understand the task.
- Only intervene if a group completely misunderstands the task.

Give the task verbally:

- A teacher might have two students who struggle to process instructions orally but have 20 who struggle to process text.
- Text has proven to be a barrier.
- Using visuals gives more students access to the task.

Two types of teachers:

- Rims - monitor by circling the perimeter
- Spokes - stays in the middle and then goes out on the spokes but returns to the center
- Neither is better than the other.

Monitoring:

- The most important question you can ask is to not ask a question.
- We think of ourselves as so important.
- Unless someone is asking a question, avoid interjecting during the engaged and fully immersed state of thinking.

When do we interject?:

- When a group looks like they're done.
- When a group is completely off the rails and it's detrimental to their learning. Offer them an alternative way to think without making them think their thinking is wrong.
- When students have made a mistake that is not part of the question you're asking them to do. The mistake will prevent them from moving forward. (Circle it with a pen. "You might want to rethink this," and step away.)

Questioning when students are done:

- "Can you explain what is going on here?"
- Maybe target the student who wasn't holding the marker as much. Gently ask that student to explain. If the student can't explain, the partner has some work to do. Every member needs to understand before moving forward.

Ask a question with a question:

- Avoid smiling and walking away at the primary level. It doesn't work with young students or those on the spectrum. "Hmm, I know for a fact that if you work on this for a few minutes, you'll figure it out on your own." Then walk away.
- Students don't listen to what we say. They listen to what we do. Our actions speak volumes.
- Walking away communicates that we believe in them and that they're capable. It moves them towards self-efficacy.

Avoid:

- Capture Recapture...don't do it. Don't try to get their attention during the flow of the task to tell them something you forgot. You get their attention to begin the task and then at the end. You're better off meeting each group one at a time to say what you forgot to say or need to add.
- Being sucked in...get in and get out. Peter says, "You have 10 seconds."

Learned helplessness:

- When a student comes up to you and asks a question on their own, say, "Where's your group? Let's go find your partner."
- There are exceptions. Always be the professional in the room. You know your kids and the subtle differences between students.