**High Impact Instruction—I Don’t Know Strategy**

**Using Questions Effectively with Students**

If questions are to keep all students engaged, then all student s must know that they are responsible for answering all questions. When teachers name a student and then ask a question, what happens is that most, if not all, of the other students in the room stop doing the thinking that is being prompted by the question. However, when a teacher poses a question, pauses for all students to think about the answer (you may need to remind students that you are purposely pausing and not waiting for them to call out), and then calls on a student, many more students do the thinking prompted by the question.

During intensive-explicit instruction, it is recommended that teachers don’t ask students to raise their hands (called Hands Up, Hands Down) so that all students know they must wait and then they may be called upon to answer the question.

During the free-wheeling discussion and dialogue of constructivist instruction, however, asking students to raise their hands allows a teacher to mediate classroom discussion and provides a procedure that allows more students to engage in the conversation.

***No Opt Out Strategies Video*** [***https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrjnccFiAfE***](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrjnccFiAfE)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLH9VGQN1XU>

It is an EXPECTATION that **everyone** answers the question they are asked. (If this has not previously been your expectation then you will need to share with students that you are implementing something new). During intensive-explicit instruction, to maintain engagement, it is recommended that teachers use a simple route to make sure that everyone answers every question and no one is ever allowed to say those three counterproductive words: “I don’t know.” The routine is Repeat, Rephrase, Reduce, and Reach Out.

*Repeat:*

The first response to a student who says “I don’t know” is to simply repeat the question. For example, if you ask, “What are the subject and the predicate of the sentence?” and a student says those three words, “I don’t know,” you simply repeat the question, exactly as you first posed it.

*Rephrase:*

It is surprising how effective it is to merely repeat the question. However, if that method leads to a repeat utterance of the three hasty words, the second step of this strategy is to restate the question using different words. Thus, a teacher might rephrase the question above, “Every sentence has an action and a noun that does the action; what are they in this sentence?”

*Reduce:*

If rephrasing fails to prompt an answer, the next step is to ask a smaller version of the question. A teacher asking about subjects and verbs, then might ask, “Let’s look for one part of my question. What are the verbs or action words in this sentence?”

*Reach Out:*

In a smaller number of cases, a student may genuinely not know and, therefore,, also say, “I don’t know.” At that point, a teacher might ask the student to “reach out” to get the answer. One teacher mentioned in a workshop that if her students struggle to answer a question, she asks them if they’d like to “phone a friend.” If the student says yes, then students who know the answer put their hands up to their ear as if they are talking on the phone, and the student can call on anyone to give the answer.

After hearing the correct answer to make sure that the student deepens his/her knowledge, the teacher should ask the student to repeat the answer, for example, in the above scenario, by describing how to find the subject and verb in a sentence.

Teachers rarely get to the reach out phase of this process, especially after students learn that everyone is expected to answer every question. Of course, teachers must scaffold questioning appropriately so that students are not embarrassed by being exposed in class as not knowing content.

***No Opt Out Strategies Video*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLH9VGQN1XU>

***I don’t know visual aid*** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rzuniga/15268475448/>

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Strategy II: "No Opt Out"

*1) Summary*  
  
            It should be a universal expectation of all teachers that it’s not okay to not try.  Teachers should hold high expectations for all students even those students who don’t hold themselves to a high level yet.  The classroom “I don’t know” mentality used by some students is an unacceptable practice; Doug Lemov explains in *Teach like a Champion*that this problem is what the “no opt out” technique was intended to combat.  “No opt out” can help address students who are simply not striving to reach the correct answer as well as students whom are struggling to get the point.  At the center of the “no opt out” technique is the idea that a sequence resulting in a student unsuccessful or unwilling to answer a question should end with that same student giving the right answer.  According to Lemov, only then is the sequence actually complete.  Students all too often reply “I don’t know” to questions; this approach can push back on teachers when a student doesn’t want to participate in learning and also when a student lacks the knowledge.  As Lemov clarifies, “I don’t know” is the students “Rosetta Stone” of work avoidance.  In the “no opt out” technique, instead of breaking from discussion, an instructor can revert a student’s “I don’t know” into a mini discussion by elaborating or merely asking the same question to another student.  Assuming the other student answers the question correctly, the instructor can return their attention to the student who “didn’t know” the answer and ask the student to repeat what in fact the correct answer is.  Essentially, by moving on and seeking a correct answer from an alternate student or the class, the whole classroom stays engaged while asking the initial student to repeat the correct answer ensures the student has no way to “opt out” from the learning process.     
  
*2) Explanation in Evidence*  
  
            Learners must have a healthy view of their ability to learn.  Thus, it is imperative that teacher’s understand that learning is incremental, that students can improve little by little.  The “no opt out” technique is a small step that little by little can help students become more comfortable with particular areas.  If students think their ability to learn is entity based, or that their problems are unavoidable, the student likely will respond with “I don’t know” to participate.  Allowing a student to rely on this cop out statement can feed the idea that their ability to learn is entity based and that some knowledge is either not accomplishable or at least not important.  The “no opt out” technique integrates scaffolding into its approach; teachers actively help draw conclusions.  When a student is unsure or defiant in answering, a teacher seeks the assistance of the class for an answer, or sometimes asks more questions, building up to a correct answer without simply giving it away.  The teacher doesn’t expect students to come up with answers themselves all the time, but it is important to help students build to answers instead of the student failing and subsequently immediately receiving the correct answer without working for it.  Finally, “no opt out” is a research proven technique because it can be a meaningful learning strategy concentrated around elaboration.  In the “no opt out” technique, sometimes it may be more appropriate for the teacher to ask more questions, or elaborate upon the initial question in order to seek out a confident and understood answer.  For example, if a preschool age student did not know the answer to what month is was, it may be beneficial to elaborate and provide a description such as “well it’s a cold month, in fall, and we celebrate what we are thankful for at the end of the month, do you know what month it is now?”  The preschooler will draw a more meaningful conclusion post elaboration than if the teacher flat out said it was November.  The repetition factor involving the student repeating the correct answer also creates a stronger way to store knowledge into long term memory.    
  
*3) Classroom Example*  
  
            As a future high school social studies/ history teacher, many of my lessons are certain to be based around a lecture format.  Although some students may find lecturing or class discussions to not be their particular preference, history and humanities courses have to be governed by some lecture review or class discussion about past events or historical moments.  I remember taking endless notes off of power points in high school and having my head completely in the clouds during those class blocks.  Sometimes the lecture would be broken by the instructor asking questions, but most often those questions were only answered by certain attentive students.  When I am holding a class discussion in my high school classes I intend to ask questions often and to all students.  The “no opt out” technique can be used in these ask and respond moments.  When a student doesn’t know an answer to a question instead of offering up the answer quickly, I will relay the question to other students or elaborate more on the question itself.  For example, if I am leading a discussion about the election of 1860, “no opt out” might look something like the mock script below.  
  
*Instructor:  Jake, can you recall who was elected in the Election of 1860?  
Jake: I don’t know…  
Instructor: Well, if you remember, the election of 1860 was a highly controversial election.  The election was a drive towards the Civil War, and the Democratic Party was so divided over the issue of slavery the new Constitutional Union Party was created… Yes, Sally?  
Sally:  Abraham Lincoln?  
Instructor: That’s right Sally, Abe Lincoln.  Who was elected in 1860 Jake?  
Jake:  Abraham Lincoln.*

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**No Opt Out 2.0**  
The new strategies for No Opt Out really resonated with me. Carried over and expanded on from the original TLAC book, the basic strategy is that you don’t accept ‘I don’t know’ as an answer and use various strategies to make sure students are held accountable for

successfully answering a question.

**If you’re not familiar already, here are the four basic formats for No Opt Out:**

1. You provide the answer; your student repeats the answer.
2. Another student provides the answer; the initial student repeats the answer.
3. You provide a cue; your student uses it to find the answer.
4. Another student provides a cue; the initial student uses it to find the answer.

In [Teach Like a Champion 2.0](http://teachlikeachampion.com/books/teach-like-champion-2-0/), Lemov and his team ramp up the rigor with ***No Opt Out 2.0***, suggesting that you follow up a successful No Opt Out with another question.  
   
**What stood out to me most were the empowering effects of this follow-up on the students. But first, the strategies:**

* Add Another At Bat. Ask the student a similar question to give them a chance to get it right the first time and feel truly successful.
* Add a Stretch. Ask them to explain why or how they got the answer or for more evidence. Or you can ask a new question that adds an additional skill or level of difficulty.
* Add an Error Analysis. Have them explain what they did wrong the first time or how they corrected themselves.
* Add a “Star.” Ask a follow-up and then close out the whole exchange with targeted praise that is like giving them a gold star. You might praise their grit or perseverance, their mastery of the skill, or the simple, fantastic correctness of their answer.

**Now back to my takeaways and what felt so empowering about this section of TLAC 2.0.**

1. ***How good must it feel for a student who got the answer wrong, to then turn around and answer a series of similar questions correctly? And then to have your teacher praise that turn around explicitly? That feels great.***

It’s not rocket science, I know, but similar to [Elisa’s reflections on Culture of Error last week](http://www.yesprep.org/theanswer/takeaways-tlac-20-culture-error), it’s so easy to just hope for the correct answer and overlook the profound experience our students can have simply by voicing a misunderstanding, fixing it, and having us genuinely recognize it.

And think of the wonders it can do for your classroom culture! Having some management issues? Try offering those kiddos some of these powerful moments instead of that extra detention.

1. ***Allow students to ask clarifying questions instead of saying ‘I don’t know.’*** This was referenced very briefly in the chapter, but really stuck with me. Instead of waiting until students say “I don’t know” to hold them accountable, train them from the beginning to monitor their understanding and advocate for themselves by asking those clarifying questions before we even have a chance to stump them with a question they don’t know the answer to. Now that’s empowering.

The training might look like having students talk at their tables and teach each other whatever the teacher just went over, pull out their misunderstandings, and then formulate written clarifying questions to ask the teacher. While it would take a while in the beginning, once students were used to monitoring their own learning, imagine the feeling of empowerment for the kids when they never have to say “I don’t know” because they’re too busy identifying missteps and asking clarifying questions.

At the end of the day, what so resonated with me from this chapter was not just how important it is to make sure students are learning and getting the right answer, but that they ***know*** they’re learning and ***feel*** the empowerment of that learning. I get goose bumps just thinking about it!  
   
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