

Strategies for Communicating High Expectations to Students
October 15, 2004

RANDOM RESPONSE OPPORTUNITIES

In your schools, do you see all students raising their hand to answer each time a question is posed? If not, what percentages of students almost always raise their hands to respond to a teacher question? Are there students who rarely or never raise their hand to answer a teacher posed question? Teachers frequently report that they have a few students who almost always raise their hands and some students who almost never raise their hands. How can teachers structure more equitable response opportunities to get all students engaged and active in learning? One research-based strategy for communicating high expectations and increasing student involvement is the use of random response opportunities.

In the September tip, the numbered heads strategy for providing random response opportunities was described. Another way to structure random response opportunities is with color.

1. For each group of four students, place four different color index cards in an envelope. Each student in the group takes one card. Groups complete the learning task assigned by the teacher.
2. After groups complete the task, the teacher poses a question related to the group task.
3. The teacher randomly names one of the colors. One way to do this is to put one of each color card in a small box and draw one out without looking. It is important that students perceive that the person selected to answer is randomly identified. Students will view the random choice as “fair.”
4. All students with the color card randomly called stand.
5. The teacher calls on one of the standing students to answer the question. Students with the same answer are seated. This procedure is repeated until all of the answer variations are reported. The ground rule is, “Be additive, not repetitive.” This avoids long, drawn out whole group reporting which can become boring and tedious. This procedure also helps teachers check for understanding.
6. The teacher then responds to the different answers and provides necessary explanations. As an alternative, the teacher can call another color and ask those students to provide the explanations for their group’s answers.

Some of the variations to the use of colored cards follow.

- All students who have the color called by the teacher can go to the board and write their group’s answer simultaneously.
- After one student answers, the teacher calls another color. The student in the same group as the student who answered must explain the thinking behind their group’s answer.
- The teacher can number the small groups. This allows the teacher to call a number and color which will identify just one person to respond instead of one person in each small group.
- The student who answers the question can call the next number or color, with the teacher providing the other indicator. Students enjoy being able to call the number or color.

Hint for Facilitating Small Group Work – AVOID REPORTERS!!!

A common method of structuring small group work is to assign roles to each of the group members. Teaching and assigning roles helps groups develop the academic and collaborative skills necessary for effective group function. One role that is commonly assigned is “reporter or spokesperson.” This person is responsible for reporting out the group’s work to the teacher and class. Often students not assigned the reporter role will pull back from the group, leaving the reporter to do the work. Once some students know they do not have to be the one doing the talking in class, they abdicate the group learning experience. To avoid this circumstance, avoid assigning a reporter in small groups and let students know that everyone is expected to be ready to talk for the group. Let students know before the task is started that a random response strategy will be used to determine the reporter for each group.