

Module Three Teacher Tip

Numbered Heads

Research clearly demonstrates that low-achieving students are less likely to be called on by the teacher than high-achieving students. When low-achievers are called upon, they are likely to be asked the easier questions requiring little more than recall of information. This pattern of classroom interaction between the teacher and students does not go unnoticed by students. Students are quick to observe who gets called on and which responses grab the teachers' attention. Who is important, smartest, and most likeable can be determined by students based on the amount and type of response opportunities students have in class. Students who have few opportunities to respond may feel ignored and that they are less capable than the high achieving students who have many more opportunities to respond in class. As a result, their motivation to learn and their academic performance may suffer.

One way to ensure more equitable response opportunities is to stop calling on students who raise their hands. Instead, use a strategy that uses a random method for asking students to respond. One such strategy is known as numbered heads. In this strategy, students are seated in small groups. The steps for using numbered heads are:

1. **STUDENTS COUNT OFF** - In each group, students count off by the number of students in the group. If you have groups of six students, students count off 1-6. They do this in whatever order they choose. If there is a group with only five students in it, one student will have two numbers.
2. **POSE A QUESTION/PROBLEM** - The teacher poses a question or problem to the class and tells groups they have a specific amount of time to come to consensus on an answer. The amount of time allotted will depend on whether the question is one with a specific "right" answer or a more open-ended question.
3. **STUDENTS PUT HEADS TOGETHER** – The students put their heads together to make sure that everyone in the group has the answer or answers.
4. **TEACHER CALLS A NUMBER** – The teacher calls a number from 1-6. All the students with that number stand. One of the standing students is called upon to give their group's answer. Standing students with different answers can be called upon to explain their group's thinking.

Possible variations to numbered heads include:

- Ask all students with the called number to go to the board to simultaneously record their group's answers.
- Use a spinner, dice, or some other random way to call the number.
- If the question has multiple answers, allow each standing student to report just one of their answers. Use the rule, "Be additive, not repetitive."

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 to effective group function. One role that is commonly assigned is "reporter or spokesperson." This person is responsible for reporting out the groups' 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.