

## Alternatives to the Traditional Question-and-Answer Dynamic

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Millersville University (PA) professors William Himmele and Pésida Himmele criticize the common classroom practice of asking a question of the whole class and calling on a few students who raise their hands. What's going on with the students who aren't called on? they wonder. "Are they with us? And how do we know? What evidence do we have that they're actively processing the content using higher-order thinking?... The quickest way to turn off the minds of shy students, English language learners, students receiving learning support, and those who are generally uninterested is to ask your questions in the form of a traditional Q&A."

A better way is for teachers to use total participation techniques that get all students thinking at a deep level and provide teachers with better information on how well students are understanding what's being taught and knowing what to do next. Some ideas:

- *Rippling* – Ask a high-level question and have all students do a quick-write or quick-draw and walk around monitoring their responses. Then have students share their response with one or two elbow partners, and then open up for all-class discussion.
- *Chalkboard splash* – After they've done a quick-write, have students boil down their thoughts to a few words and write them on the chalkboard.
- *Debate team carousel* – Students are asked to analyze an issue (for example, Should children should be allowed to work on farms?) and write their initial opinion and reasons in the first of four quadrants on a piece of paper. Students then write their initials by their responses and pass papers to the right, and everyone reads what's in the first box of the paper they received and adds another reason for that point of view. Students again initial their responses and pass papers to the right, and in the third quadrant, they refute the arguments made in the first two. Finally, students initial their response, pass the papers again, read what's been written in the first three boxes, and write their considered opinion in the fourth box. It's then time for all-class discussion.
- *Picture notes* – Elementary students visiting a museum are given a worksheet with three boxes at the top in which they are to draw pictures capturing important steps in what they are seeing (for example, George Washington coming to Betsy Ross about creating a flag, Washington's initial suggestion, and Ross's final creation). Students then write in a space in the middle of their papers what was important to remember about what their pictures described. Finally, students write in the space at the bottom of their papers why it's important to remember what they described and wrote about.

"How to Know What Students Know" by William Himmele and Pésida Himmele in *Educational Leadership*, September 2012 (Vol. 70, #1, p. 58-62), [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org); the authors can be reached at [William.Himmele@millersville.edu](mailto:William.Himmele@millersville.edu) and [Perside.Himmele@millersville.edu](mailto:Perside.Himmele@millersville.edu)