

3 Underutilized Classroom Teaching Techniques

Three of the most powerful classroom techniques are often underutilized, and they don't seem like techniques at all. They often appear more as categories because several strategies are used to enable them. They do, however, qualify as classroom techniques because using them facilitates depth of learning. They can be used independently or in combination, and they apply well to any kind of lesson or unit of study, especially in Project-Based Learning activities, lessons, and/or units of study; however, to be effective, they need to be explicitly taught and strategically directed.

1. Conversation



Conversation as a classroom technique is more than just chatter. It is focused, directed, and purposeful, and it's monitored for effectiveness. Structures enabling focused conversations include cooperative learning strategies such as "Think-Pair-Share" and "Numbered Heads Together," where students share findings with partners and/or in groups. These types of conversational strategies allow students to refine what they understand and learn from others what they might not have discovered themselves.

2. Silence



Silence facilitates thought and reflection. It's where verbal conversation stops and metacognitive interior contemplation begins. It's the listening phase and sometimes called "inner talk" or "inner voice". It's where students take what they have learned and make it relevant to their own lives and experiences. One way to use silence as a technique is during whole-class student question/answer sessions.

When students volunteer or are called on to answer questions, give them time to think of answers---quiet time---and encourage the class to remain patient and allow these students time to think. Thinkers need time to envision what they are asked to do or say, compare what they already know to what they have learned, analyze it for relevancy, and then synthesize it to produce a vocal utterance that makes sense. No small task when asked to comment on content newly learned.

3. Movement



Movement is critical to effective learning. It allows for the application of concepts learned; it turns learning into a physical response helping to internalize concepts; it's perfect for most learners, especially ESL students.

Movement also works well when applied to the sounds of language and the physical expression and characterization of emotion. It motivates students to want to learn more by bringing significance to the learning process, and it provides a mental and physical release for those who patiently waited for their classmates to answer questions.

Make These Techniques Explicit

These three teaching techniques get overlooked because they are part of the natural learning process, but they are powerful when used as to facilitate understanding

---and they are absolutely necessary to help students develop critical, intelligent thinking patterns that enable them to understand abstract concepts well enough to create useful ideas and solutions.

But don't just tell students to use them. Teach students how to use them to their advantage, and they will thrive.

5 Ways Project-Based Learning Enables Intelligent Thinking



Students want to learn. Active participation motivates them to engage in the type of mental rigor required to learn. Project-Based Learning (PBL) provides relevant opportunities that combine this innate desire to learn with the type of active participation that prompts students to ask the higher-level questions of how and why they arrived at their findings.

In short---PBL activities require students to think about what they are learning in an intelligent way.

The Gist of Project-Based Learning (PBL)

1. More doing and less sitting and listening.

Students go beyond the hands-on as a means of production into the hands-in doing the actual work. They have to think about what they are doing, and they start asking questions that lead to greater understandings.

2. Collaborative / team building activities

Students learn to listen, analyze, and evaluate varied perspectives, while tolerance and social skills develop in the process.

3. Options for differentiated learning through varied perspectives

Students offer autonomous participation in groups by bringing with them varied perspectives for analysis and insight. This type of examination also develops verbal communication skills as well as skills in persuasion.

4. Relevant applications of skills learned to real world situations

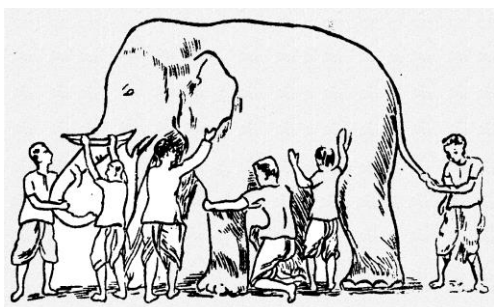
Students work hand-in-hand with real world situations---professionals building models, raising community awareness, or collaborating with scientists, community coordinators, and the like, in real studies.

5. Emphasizes the use of critical and creative thinking

Students engage in using critical thinking skills to make decisions and solve problems while in the creative process of looking for ways to do so.

Point of View, Varied Perspectives, Insightful Discoveries, and PBL

A greater understanding of a larger problem, topic, or situation comes from examining things from various perspectives. Examining points of view is one critical thinking skill students need to understand that their way of doing things may not be the only way to achieve that greater understanding.



Think of the fable *The Blind Men and The Elephant*. Each blind man was able to describe the one section of the object (elephant) by touch, but none of them could tell what the object was until they combined their findings. They analyzed, synthesized, and by making connections, they discovered something new---or at least something that none of them had thought of on their own.

Or consider the story with the opposite outcome: *The Six Blind Men and China*. All six men had their own perspective, but none would listen to the other, so all of them left China never really understanding the country at all.

The point---Learning how to use critical thinking skills enables intelligent thinking.

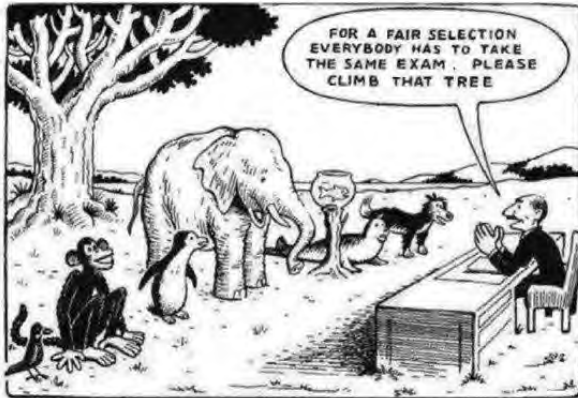
- Encourage your students to examine varied perspectives as an intelligent way to learn.
- Incorporate Project-Based Learning into your instruction, and your students will thrive.

Take a look at these **PBL Buy Today-Teach Tomorrow** units from [GoTeachGo](#) and available on the [TeachersPayTeachers](#) website. They will keep your students motivated and excited about learning. **Recommended Reading:** [Introducing Project-Based Learning](#)

5 Ways to Break the Efficiency Trap and Focus on Effective Instruction

Everyone is in such a hurry these days, and we in the system of public education are no exception.

Our Education System



If you judge a fish by its 'ability' to climb a tree, it will spend its entire life believing its stupid - Albert Einstein

We want our students to measure up, and we want them to do it right now.

- We want them to measure up to a whole bunch of different things at the same time and at the same rate.
- We focus on teaching to the test because we have to.
- We use measurements that efficiently show how well students think on a lower level.

And then---we actually bemoan our students' inability to think critically, creatively, and effectively on a higher level.

It's time to consider alternatives.

1. Leave Test-Data Disaggregation to Administrators

It's fine for administrators and policy makers to use data from standardized tests as a comparative measurement of basic skills proficiency---and they should; however, it's not okay when the results are taken as the only measure of student learning or as an indication of future success in life. Basic skills proficiency is the most important first step in developing higher-level thinking skills, and it's important information for teachers to know as one element in planning their instruction---but---

---basic skills development should not be the only goal of instruction.

2. Let Teachers Bump-up the Effectiveness of Instruction

Teachers need to be able to focus on multiple measures to develop effective instruction; however, many educators get mired in state, national, and administrative mandated efficiency checklists required to show that, “Yep---we covered that.”

This happens way too much in education. So much so that in some schools, the result is a total lack of effectiveness, and thus---no efficiency at all---the Catch-22 of instruction where test scores stall and instruction produces a Numskull Effect---a generation of students, and a society who think that being educated means passing tests.

3. Trust the Teachers to Know What They Are Doing

It's time to trust the practitioners. Let the teachers create instruction that develops critical and creative thinking skills in an effective way and as applicable to situations in the 21st century. Support them with staff development that empowers them to continue developing their skills while investigating project-based learning options that work.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) guarantees an effective application of basic skills that enable the development of critical and creative thinking. PBL options also provide relevant educational experiences that motivate students to withstand the rigor involved in higher-level thinking tasks. The activities are social in a productive way so students and teachers love them, and administrators and policy makers enjoy the positive feedback and outcomes.

4. Invest in Technology and Create 5-Year Upgrade Plans

There are as many reasons to use technology as not, but talk about a motivator. Students love it. The grumbling stops when technology is involved, and teachers use it to effectively manage time and student data. It's costly, but it's possible to provide schools with quality equipment.

For examples of innovative ways to use technology in the classroom, and for alternatives to the lecture-based, sage-on-the-stage approaches to teaching, read the article "[The Flipped Mobile Classroom: Learning 'Upside-Down'](#)" on Edutopia.

5. Listen to Advice from Business Professionals

Yavor Ivanov, Founder of Xenium, asserts that entrepreneurs need to focus on being effective rather than on being efficient because "Few of us can be efficient for a long period of time."

While Ivanov in his article "[Habits of the Successful Entrepreneurs](#)" targets business professionals, his ideas examine the connection between quality and quantity, where a focus on effectiveness ensures that products can be efficiently measured in a qualitative way.

---and more of this is needed in education today.

As Ivanov says: "Focus on being effective and do one thing, but do the right one. Then do it well. Then go for efficiency. Repeat!"

Guest Blog Post #4 from [GoTeachGo](#)
Be Sure to Visit [TeachersPayTeachers](#) to examine lots of great PBL units of study.
Recommended Reading: "[Authentic Assessment Benefits](#)"

Use this 3-part Process to Improve Reading Comprehension



These six proven reading comprehension strategies from *Strategies That Work*, *Mosaic of Thought* and *Reading with Meaning*, work well when taught explicitly to students.

The Six Reading Comprehension Strategies

1. Making Connections
2. Questioning
3. Visualizing
4. Inferring
5. Determining Importance
6. Synthesizing

When practiced and applied to reading all types of content, students internalize what they read and begin to read better on their own. Teaching these strategies is especially important for young readers, for struggling readers, and for ESL students. They also enable critical thinking and help all students understand on a deeper level what they read.

- **But what about those students who do read well and are looking for a way to comprehend large chunks of information in a short period of time?**

Try using these reading strategies within this 3-step process. The process works well when trying to remember historical figures and the significance of their contributions throughout history.

THE PROCESS

Print this process out and hand copies out to student to use as they read.

1. Read the character's name.

- Read it out loud. Sound it out if you need to. Look for phonetic markings next to the name in parenthesis, in footnotes, or in indices.
- Make a connection. Ask yourself if you have ever heard a names like those of historical characters. What sounds familiar? What makes this name different than anything you have heard?
- Question the origin of the name. Is the name a family name? Look for prefixes such as "Mac" or "van" or "von"; and suffixes such as "son". Is this name from a royal family? Look for Roman

numeral indicators such as IV and XII that suggest lineage. Does the name indicate a warrior type? Look for descriptors such as “The Lion-Hearted” and “The Impaler” following the first name.

2. Read what the character does.

- Question the significance of the actions. What affect do they have on others, on countries, on changing the course of history? Determine the importance of the actions. How did the actions help or hurt others, help or destroy countries, and/or shape the course of history?
- Make inferences about how opposite actions may have changed others, countries, and the course of history.
- Make connections. Think about what you see in society today that may be similar to the actions of this character or how your own behavior has been affected by these actions.

3. Imagine the character doing it.

- Envision what the character actually does. Imagine him/her leading a charge into battle, taking a stand against injustice with a sit-in or a boycott, and visualize character interactions. Who followed these characters or fought against them?
- Use your five senses to smell the sweat of the horses. Hear the galloping of hooves on the fields of battle and the clanking of swords, the firing of guns, the booming of cannons, and the agony of injury; smell the fires burning, feel the fire hose spraying water, hear the hateful shouts and terrified screams; or feel the exaltation of group consensus and the thrill of victory; hear the applause of recognition and the rallying cries for freedom.
- Make connections. What have you seen, read about or been a part of that is similar to some of the actions taken by these characters?
- What is the significance of these actions on the world today? Reenact these actions in your mind step-by-step. What could have been done differently? Better? Why are these actions important to know about today?

Following this 3-step process holds knowledge in short-term memory long enough to use the six reading strategies to plug the information into long-term memory. The process will help students learn a lot of information fast, but it will also help develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the relevance of how historical characters and events have shaped societies and world events.

Adapt this process to fit with the Project Based Learning (PBL) unit from GoTeachGo, *Comic-Con: A new Series of Comics for the Sunday Funnies*. In this unit, students apply what they learn in literature about characters and their actions and generate their interpretations within a comic strip structure. The unit can be adapted to include historical characters as well, covering the nonfiction requirement of ELA Common Core State Standards.



This PBL unit, like all those from GoTeachGo, can be purchased on TeachersPayTeachers.

Be sure to visit Kate's TeachersPayTeachers site for lots of great PBL units.

Recommended Reading:

Comprehension Strategies

Kids Discover - Historical Figures

Reading and Memory

Strategies That Work, Mosaic of Thought and Reading with Meaning

Illustration credit: St. Joan of Arc School

Guest Blog Post #16 - GoTeachGo