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Group-Response Techniques

General Academic ^[1]

When students respond as a group to academic content, they are actively engaged and more likely to learn the material being taught. Just as important, the teacher can observe student responses to get immediate feedback about whether the majority of students in the class are truly understanding the academic content. Here are two group-response techniques (Heward, 1996):

Choral Responding:

Many teacher-led activities are suitable for using choral responding (all students in the class or group respond orally in unison to a teacher prompt). Choral responding is ideal for curriculum content that:

- can be answered in short (1-3 word) responses
- has only a single correct answer to to question
- can be presented in a fast-paced manner.

The teacher should introduce choral responding by providing clear directions and modeling the procedure. To avoid confusion, the teacher should use a clear, consistent cue to signal to students to respond. (The instructor may also choose to institute a 'thinking pause', having students silently collect their thoughts before giving them the signal to answer.)

When choral response is used, some students may offer incorrect answers; the instructor should provide feedback to the group about the 'majority' response (the response called out or signaled by the largest number of students). The teacher can keep students focused on the group activity by occasionally calling on a randomly selected individual child to answer. Choral responding works best when delivered at an appropriately rapid pace.

Response Cards:

Students can respond as a group by displaying 'response cards' which display their answers to a teacher question or academic problem. Two response-card formats may be used: (1) cards with pre-printed response choices (e.g., "YES/NO") and (2) cards on which students write their responses.

Irrespective of the type of card format used, the teacher should introduce response cards by explaining and demonstrating their use and letting students practice the response procedure until they are proficient in using the cards. The instructor should maintain a quick, lively pace through

the lesson, providing clear clues about when the students should hold up or put down their cards. Some students will inevitably offer an incorrect answer; the instructor should simply focus on, and provide feedback for, the majority response.

If pre-printed response cards are used, the instructor will have the best results if the cards contain items that are clearly legible from the front of the room, are designed to be easy for students to manipulate and display to the teacher, and have sufficiently few items to prevent students from becoming confused. (Additional items or cards can be added to the class's routine as students master the use of the cards.)

If write-on response cards are used, it is best to limit responses to 1 to 2 words if possible. Students may shy away from writing, or be slowed down, by problems with spelling. Among useful strategies to reduce spelling difficulties, the instructor could:

- have students 'pre-practice' the spelling of new vocabulary words prior to the lesson
- post unfamiliar spelling terms on the board for students to refer to as they write their responses, or
- encourage students to try their best in spelling their responses but reassure them that misspellings will not be counted against them.

Performance Feedback:

Regular instructor feedback is build into both choral responding and use of response cards. In giving feedback, the teacher should give students information about whether the majority class response is correct, and immediately provide the correct response and supporting explanation if a significant number of students had answered incorrectly. Those items missed by many students should be presented again later in the lesson to ensure that students have learned the material after receiving corrective feedback.

The instructor should also praise students periodically for for appropriate and prompt use of the group response format. Additionally, the teacher should acknowledge and validate answers that differ from the instructor's but could still be considered correct.

Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using 'Group-Response Techniques'

Q: When I use response cards with my class, I notice that some students copy the responses from their neighbors' cards instead of thinking of their own answers. What should I do about this?

Response cards provide children with a means of getting actively involved in the lesson. Therefore, children should not be discouraged from looking at each others' cards, even if they appear to be copying the response of other students. Rather, the teacher should interpret this student behavior as a possible sign that the child may be confused about the task or may not yet have a firm grasp on the material being presented. In either instance, the instructor can make arrangements to provide the child with additional instruction and guidance as needed.

References

- Heward, W.L. (1996). Three low-tech strategies for increasing the frequency of active student response during group instruction. In R. Gardner III, D. M.Sainato, J.O.Cooper, T.E.Heron, W.L.Heward, J.W.Eshleman, & T.A.Grossi (Eds.) Behavior analysis in education: Focus on measurably superior instruction (pp.283-320). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

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