

Responsive Teaching



Tom Sherrington and Sara Stafford

What's the idea?

Memory is strengthened by retrieval practice.

What does it mean?

This is one part of 'formative assessment'. Classroom research indicates that effective teachers ask more questions to more students, in a more in-depth way, checking for understanding across all students.

Teachers need a good flow of dynamic feedback from students about their learning and the success of the teaching to adjust the flow of instruction. This allows them to give students the right feedback, the right level of reinforcement and the most appropriate questions and information.

In essence, we need feedback just as much as our students so we can adjust and maximise our effectiveness.

What are the implications for teachers?

You can't see learning, so you need constant feedback from your students about the extent of their understanding. This means asking lots of questions to multiple students, with probing exchanges to establish what they've learned and how well you've been teaching them. One student's response isn't

enough (at the very least, it's a huge and risky assumption). Avoid the classic pitfall of rhetorical questions such as, 'Is everyone ok with that?'

There are lots of questioning techniques to help you, including: Doug Lemov's 'Cold Call' to break away from 'hands up'; probing questions that extend every question session; think-pair-share to get everyone involved; using mini-whiteboards to get a sense of every student's thinking.

TOP TIPS / Keep taking your bearings along the learning journey. Ask yourself, 'How do I know which students have understood this?'

Ask more in-depth questions to more students. Build the habit of making every question exchange into a mini-discussion with every student, making it clear that you might ask anyone.

Want to know more?

William, D. Embedded Formative Assessment (2011) Solution Tree Press.

Barak Rosenshine Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know. American Educator Vol. 36, No. 1, Spring 2012, AFT, Strategies 3 and 6.

Nuthall, G Understanding how students learn and remember what they learn in Hidden Lives of Learners (2007) NZCER Press.

Lemov, D Teach Like a Champion 2.0 (2015) Jossey Bass Technique 33: Cold Call

