Triple R Teaching

Hello, Anna Geiger here from Reach All Readers for Episode 92 of the Triple R

o talk about how to keep your students engaged during your lessons by having them respond frequently.

I think many times with our lessons, it's teacher says, teacher says, teacher says, teacher says, teacher says, question, students respond, teacher says, and so on. That's really not what we want, according to Dr. Anita Archer. I've mentioned her before, she's amazing. If you ever watch her workshops where she's teaching you or her workshops where she's teaching students, either way, she's constantly eliciting responses. She's constantly keeping you with her.

Today we want to talk about how you can do that in your classroom.

The reason we want to do this, not only does it keep students engaged and decrease misbehaviors, it also helps students learn more. Research tells us that the more you do this act of retrieval where you are getting the information out of your head and rehearsing it, saying it out loud, you are going to learn more. So we're doing two important things here, we're keeping students engaged in the lessons so it moves more smoothly, and we're helping them master the material.

Let's talk about three kinds of responses: they can be oral, they can be written, or they can be action responses.

What we want to avoid when we're asking for oral responses is the traditional method where we ask a question, students raise their hand, and we call on someone. When this happens, according to Dr. Archer, the teacher ends up teaching the best and leaving the rest.

She tells us that it doesn't make sense to have students raise their hand to answer when you're asking a question that everyone ought to know. If it's a question that reflects what you've taught them, everyone is responsible for knowing that, so you

should choose who answers, you shouldn't have students volunteer answers.

The only time it makes sense to have students volunteer is when the question requires them to think about their background or their experience, and their answers are going to be unique to them. If it's an answer that everyone should know, because we've taught it to everyone, then we don't want to call on volunteers.

What we can do a lot of is choral responses where we have all students answer together, and Dr. Archer does this all the time in her workshops, she's a master at it. She usually uses the word "everyone." So she asks a question, she says, "Everyone?" and they answer. You want to have a specific word or action or some kind of signal that your students recognize to know that, oh, my turn to answer, we're all answering together. So hers is "everyone," you could do everyone with your hand behind your ear.

For example, "S-H spells the sound... everyone?" /sh/. Or, "Let's read this sentence together, everyone?" Or, "Five plus five equals... everyone?" When you ask these simple retrieval questions, it works really well to have everyone answer at the same time.

Another way to have students respond orally is through partner responses. Here's a few tips. When you assign partners, make sure that the lowest performing students are matched with middle performing students, not the highest performing or another low performing. If they're with middle performing, then the middle performing students will tend to be more supportive, allowing those lower performing students to actually respond. We don't want someone doing all of the work. Then when you assign partners, call one of them a "one" and one of them a "two," so you can easily say "Ones, turn to your partner and tell them the problem of the story. Begin by saying, the problem in the story was..."

Giving them sentence starters as they begin their responses is really good, because it allows them to articulate their responses a little more quickly, use full sentences, and they're more likely to stay on topic. It also helps them with retrieving that information and formulating their answer, so use sentence starters as much as you think of it.

Let's go back a minute to when I was talking about not calling on volunteers when it's information you expect everyone to know. Instead, using choral responses or just choosing a student at random to answer the question. You might be wondering, well, what do I do when a particular student is daydreaming or just not paying attention and is off-task? How do I get them back?

One common thing that teachers have done is to call on them, right, to basically call them out when they're not paying attention. But when you think about it, that really doesn't achieve very much. It just embarrasses them and doesn't really encourage participation. Dr. Archer tells us that some better ways to bring someone back who is distracted are to move closer to them or to give a directive to the whole group.

So you might say, "Everyone, I need eyes up here," or give them something physical to do like "Everyone, put your finger on the first word of the passage," or "Everyone, show me the heading, the first heading of the passage." Or maybe even have them draw something, like "Draw a circle on your paper. In the circle, write the name of the main character," something like that to get everyone back together. So that was oral responses.

Let's talk about written responses, particularly what's called "response slates." A response slate could just be one of those mini dry erase boards with a marker and eraser. Everyone can have one of those and they pull them out. You ask a question, they write their response, and you give them a signal for flipping them so that you can quickly see everyone's answer and give corrective feedback as needed.

Research shows that the use of response slates or dry erase boards is very useful for a number of reasons. One is that it increases the opportunities for students to respond, and remember, that act of retrieval and then rehearsing the answer by saying it or writing it really improves learning. This provides more opportunities for that. It also increases the number of students who are participating. It increases academic achievement, like I just said, and it decreases off-task behavior.

Finally, let's talk about action responses. Those are when you ask your students to do something physical to keep them engaged in the lesson. This may be just something very, very basic, such as, "I'm going to give you a new vocabulary word. If this is a word you're familiar with and you know it, you could tell me what it means, then put your thumb up right by your chest. If you are sort of knowing the word, put your thumb out to the side. And if you've never heard of the word or you have no idea what it means, put your thumb down. The word is exuberant," and then just watch what they do. You can very quickly see where your students are at as you move forward with your lesson, but it also keeps them engaged and participating.

One thing I like to do is have students act out vocabulary words, which may mean just sitting at their desk and changing their facial expression. For example, "Show me what it looks like when you feel disappointed," or "So and so, could you show us what it looks like to dash across the room?"

So today we talked about three different types of responses that students can give to keep them engaged in the lesson. We talked about oral, written, and action responses. If you want more ideas for each of these, be sure to check out explicit instruction by Anita Archer and Charles Hughes. I will share that in the show notes for today's episode, which you can find at reachallreaders.com/episode92. Talk to you next time!