



## **Episode 1: Classroom Assessment Techniques**

We're here to bring instructors and teachers inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that they can utilize in their everyday teaching. We hope the following tips, tricks, and pedagogy techniques give teachers and instructors an extra boost of creativity and motivation. These episodes are perfect for your drive to work or can be integrated as a 15-minute think session to get your wheels turning before stepping into the classroom or "zooming" onto the computer screen.

In episode one, we'll be taking a dive into different classroom assessment techniques that you can begin using in your own courses, both online and face-to-face. From application cards to a pros and cons list and even a polling system, there are numerous techniques you can use to make sure your students are following along, engaged and learning.

### **"Everybody with Me?" and Other Not-so-useful Questions**

"Any questions?" "Is everybody with me?" "Does this make sense?" I have asked my students these vague types of questions many times and the most common response was...silence. But how should I interpret the silence? Perhaps the students understand everything completely and therefore have no questions. Maybe they have questions but are afraid to ask them out of fear of looking stupid. Or it could mean that they are so lost they don't even

know what to ask! Only our boldest students would say; “Um, you lost me 10 minutes ago, can you repeat the whole thing again?”

Another problem with vague prompts is that people, especially students, often suffer from “overconfidence bias.” They believe they understand something when someone explains it and don’t realize the limits of their understanding until faced with a specific problem or question that requires them to apply their learning. In fact, there is some evidence that college students who understand the material the least are the most prone to overrate their competence. This is referred to as the Dunning-Kruger effect (Kruger and Dunning, 1999).

Unfortunately, students are not the only people vulnerable to overconfidence bias. Kearney and Sheffer (2015) write about the overconfident professor, stating; “When one student answers a question correctly in class, we move on, believing that if one person provided a correct answer, then they must all be ‘getting it.’”

Vague prompts also can unintentionally signal to students that we secretly hope they don’t have questions because we want to move on. Many years ago, I observed a faculty member (who was otherwise a great teacher) ask her class, “Do you have any questions?” while at the same time closing her book and taking out the handout for the next activity. Not surprisingly, no one had questions. When I mentioned this to her after class, she was unaware of the signal her actions may have sent and appreciated the feedback, which shows the value of teachers observing each other, but I digress.

### **An alternative: Classroom Assessment Techniques**

The best alternative to the vague “any questions?” prompt is to use a brief Classroom Assessment Technique or CAT (Angelo and Cross, 1993). CATs do not need to be elaborate or require extensive preparation or class time.

For example, the muddiest point exercise simply asks students to write for a few minutes about what they consider to be the most confusing or unclear aspects of the concept being explored. The authors describe this as “just about the simplest Classroom Assessment Technique imaginable” and that “it provides a high information return for the very low investment of time and energy.” This simple exercise has many benefits:

- Unlike the prompt, “Any questions?” which may signal that the teacher hopes that there are no questions so he can move on, the muddiest



point exercise signals that confusion is a normal and expected part of the learning process.

- Because the students are writing privately, there is less stigma than raising one's hand.
- The teacher gets a more complete picture of student learning than one or two students raising their hands.

A high return, indeed, for an investment of about five minutes of class time!

Other examples of CATs include: directed paraphrasing, where students restate in their own words the main points of a lesson; and a pros and cons grid, which asks students to analyze the costs and benefits or advantages or disadvantages of two choices. Angelo and Cross (1993) give examples of how to use a pros and cons grid in a variety of courses including evaluating two possible designs in an engineering course or confronting an ethical dilemma in an anthropology course.

Angelo and Cross's book lists 50 CATs along with implementation tips and guidelines for when to use the various CATs, For example, some CATs are designed to assess content knowledge, while others can assess higher-order skills, such as analysis and application, and still, others are useful in assessing affective constructs, such as attitudes, values, and self-awareness.

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