

Random Calling: Solutions for “I Don’t Know”

When posing questions to your class, you can use random calling, instead of taking volunteers, to increase attention and participation. But when using random calling, you also have to be prepared to hear “I don’t know” from some kids and have ways to keep them firmly, but gently, on the hook for contributing anyway. Here are three ideas that might help.

❖ What I Do Know Is...

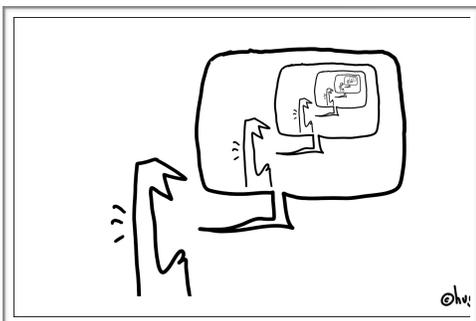
Pose a question to the class. Call on a random student. If a student says “I don’t know” say “Okay. But what do you know related to this question?” For example, if you have a math equation up and the student doesn’t know the solution, he can tell you which steps he knew to take before he got stuck. Or he can tell you what we are trying to solve for or what some of the symbols mean. This keeps him engaged in the process and allows you to push his learning forward. If the question you posed has a less discreet answer, like “Why is Napoleon an important historical figure?” the student can say what he does know about Napoleon, even if it is not why he’s important.



VARIATION: Another way to do this is to respond to a student saying, “I don’t know” with “Okay. But pretend that you do know, what would you say?” Or, Alternately, you could say, “What would you say if you did know?” Because now he is just pretending or guessing, it takes the pressure off needing to have the right answer and frees him up to try.

❖ Answer or Echo

Pose a question to the class and randomly call on a student. If the student struggles to answer, offer her the choice to “answer or echo.” If she cannot come up with an answer she then has the option to stand up and select someone else to answer. Or she can ask you to choose someone else. A different student is then called on, while the first student remains standing. The next student called on has the same choice, but if the next student also chooses “echo,” that student also stands up. Eventually you will call on a student who is willing to share an answer. After a student shares, each of the previous students who had said “echo” must repeat the response given before they can sit down again. VARIATION: Instead of repeating the given answer, echoing students can choose to add to the given answer or disagree with the given answer and explain why. Note: We only echo correct answers. And echoes can be done individually or chorally, though individually is generally the most effective.



Random Calling: Solutions for “I Don’t Know”

❖ Numbered Groups

Place students in groups of 4 and assign each student in the group a number: 1, 2, 3, and 4. If you have one or two groups of 3, that is okay. Just number them 1-3.



Pose a question to the class and ask groups to briefly (in less than 60 seconds) discuss the answer. Then randomly select a number between 1-4. If you choose #2, for example, then the 2s in each group stand up and each 2 gives an answer to the question. Repeat with more questions, choosing a different number each time or using a spinner or dice to randomly choose.

Tips & Tricks:

- ❖ If the first #2 you call on says “I don't know,” then you can skip them and come back to them after all the other 2s have answered. Then they can repeat or summarize or add to what the others 2s said.
- ❖ If you call #4 and you have a couple of groups with only 3 people, then they (or you) can choose which person to have stand up to answer.
- ❖ With dice, if you roll a 5 it is “teacher’s choice,” and the teacher decides which number between 1 and 4 will stand up and answer. If you roll a 6 it is “group’s choice.”