



# Just for the ASKing!

by Bruce Oliver

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## Power Tools



Bruce facilitating the **Leading the Learning®** workshop

Television shows like “Property Brothers” and “Rehab Addict” have made many of us more comfortable with our use of power tools and caused us to head to home improvement stores to purchase new and different tools. It is important to note that the term power tools need not be limited to construction, home repairs, or demanding manual labor. In the classroom, we can use our own power tools to help students complete learning tasks more efficiently and produce stronger demonstrations of learning. Such classroom power tools are featured in this issue of *Just for the ASKing!* What makes the tools especially powerful is that they put the power in the hands of the students. Let’s go shopping for some new power tools!

### **Chunk-Challenge-Chew-Chat-Check**

Teachers frequently ask questions during instructional delivery to determine if students are following the lesson. Unfortunately when students respond with an incorrect answer, teachers sometimes provide an appropriate answer and move on. As teachers, we can get lost in the moment and do not stop to realize that this practice is ineffective. In an Education Update article, instructional coach Emily Mather provides an alternate approach that has the potential to increase learning and places more responsibility on students. Mather calls this strategy **Chunk-Challenge-Chew-Chat-Check**.

- **Chunk:** Break the content down into smaller segments (perhaps 10 minutes)
- **Challenge:** Present questions to students so that they delve more deeply into the content
- **Chew:** Ask students to think deeply about possible responses to the challenge and engage in Think-Pair-Share or complete a quick write
- **Chat:** Involve students in a structured discussion during which they are encouraged to use academic language, practice their discussion skills, and increase their overall comprehension
- **Check:** Assess learning with brief writings and targeted questions

Ms. Mather notes, “The approach is especially effective for English Language Learners (ELLs) who often fall behind when the delivery of content outpaces their ability to process it and express their understanding.”

### **Reflection and Self-Assessment**

In the mistaken belief that coverage of content can result in more than exposure, some teachers do not take the time to allow students to reflect on their learning. One of the most effective strategies for making learning more permanent is asking students to assess their progress. With clear and meaningful assessment criteria, students can judge and evaluate their learning by responding to several questions such as the following:

- What was I trying to accomplish?
- How did I go about completing my work and identifying and solving problems I had while I was working?
- What did I do particularly well?

- What was difficult for me? Why did I struggle with this learning chunk?
- What have I learned and what will I do differently in the future?

In a **Teaching Channel** clip, ninth grade teacher Paige Price employs a strategy that asks her students to focus on their best work, hence their “shining moment.” As a summarizing strategy, students reflect on a performance, something they are especially proud of, what stands out in their work, or some improvement they have made. They then take time to write about their pride in their work. Ms. Price has concluded that when students take the time to focus on their proud moments, they are more likely to apply similar behavior in the future.

### Carefully Crafted Question Stems

Students may not fully understand what constitutes a solid, thought-provoking question. If asked to develop questions related to the content, they may respond with fact-based questions or ones with only short answers. In order to help students develop more complex questions that require deeper reasoning, teachers can structure learning experiences by providing question stems from which students can construct questions. Examples of question stems include:

- Based on what you know, what can you predict about...?
- How does... tie in with what we have learned before?
- How does this match what you thought you knew?
- Suppose...what then?

Examples of carefully crafted question stems appear in many Just ASK books and e-newsletters and in the online **Just ASK Resource Center**. For example, Heather Clayton provides an in-depth analysis on questioning in two issues of the Just ASK e-newsletter ***Making the Common Core Come Alive!***: “The Art of Questioning: The Student’s Role” and “The Art of Questioning: The Teacher’s Role” Categories include:

- Stems That Promote Evidence-Based Thinking
- Open-Ended Questioning for Responding to Reading
- Open-Ended Questions for Thinking Mathematically
- Student Questions in Response to Math Problems

When students are required to analyze/create questions, they will better understand more sophisticated thinking and respond in more complex ways to questions in the future.

### Closing Arguments

To maximize the depth and breadth of learning, lessons are best designed to include a summarizer that causes students to think about the lesson content and reach some conclusions about what they have learned. The closing argument strategy requires students to complete and submit a brief piece of writing based on the topic that was studied that day. Options might include taking a stand on a controversial topic, convincing someone to change her mind, or explaining how the day’s lesson caused them to change their mind. The writings are best shared with classmates prior to submission because they can generate compelling dialogues during which the teacher can circulate to better determine the lesson’s impact.

Johnson and Johnson’s **Collaborative Controversy** described on page 18 of ***Active Learning and Engagement Strategies*** takes this deeper thinking to a whole new level. See pages 7-10 of that text for an introduction to many more ways to have students process their learning. Another valuable resource for promoting this kind of thinking is Harvard University School of Education **Project Zero’s Visible Thinking** website. One strategy described there asks students to respond to three stems:

- **See:** What do you note?



- **Think:** What do you think about what you see?
- **Wonder:** What questions come to mind?

After thinking about these questions, students complete the following statements.

- I used to think \_\_\_\_\_ but now I think \_\_\_\_\_.
- The reasons I now think this are \_\_\_\_\_.

### Not an Option\*

It is unacceptable for students not to participate, so we need a multitude of strategies (aka power tools) for helping them become active members of the learning community. The better we can identify the cause for the lack of participation, the better we can select our intervention. No one of these options is guaranteed to work all the time, but teacher commitment to having all students participate is the first step.

- Use wait time. That is three to five seconds, not three minutes!
- Give choices. “Is it A or B?”
- Ask opinion questions. “If you had to decide which action to take, what would you do/recommend?”
- Use positive non-verbal encouragement such as nods, smiles, eye contact.
- Have students call on another student by naming that student and repeating the question for that student.
- Use limited number of “I Pass on This One” cards.
- Use slates or signal cards as a means of non-verbal responses.
- Have students work in pairs and report their partner’s answer.
- Listen in during small group discussions/work to see if the student is responding/participating in that setting. If so, either you or a student in the group can paraphrase what the student said.
- Interact with the student during small group discussions.
- Conventional wisdom is that questions should be “beamed” to the entire class. With students who tend not to participate, call the name before asking the question as in, “Jose, how did...?” To hold the rest of the class accountable, you can call on another student with a follow-up question such as, “Maria, what variable did he have to analyze to...?”
- Hold private conferences for building relationships, identifying causes of lack of participation, and pinpointing areas of interest or concern of student.
- Following private personal interaction, meet the student at the door and privately use one of the following statements as appropriate to the situation:
  - “Here is the answer to #10. I’ll call on you to answer it.”
  - “We’re going to review Exercise 2B and I am going to ask you to answer #5. Be ready.”
  - “We’re going to be doing exercise 2B. Look through it and signal me which one you’ll be ready to answer.”

\* The **Not an Option** segment is reprinted from page 81 in *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners* by permission of the author and Just ASK Publications.

### Restore the Balance

Research shows that only a small portion of students participate in (or even dominate) classroom discussions and a larger number of “onlookers” are non-participants. It is an experience that most educators decry and they would like to see a greater balance in participation in discussions. The name provided for this unfortunate phenomenon is the 80-20 rule of student interaction. The result of such an effect is that active participants gain strength in learning while “low-achieving students tend to demonstrate progressively lower rates of classroom interactions the longer they are in school, often descending into a downward spiral of disengagement.” McREL Chief Executive Officer Bryan Goodwin



has delved into the problem more deeply in his article “Get All Students to Speak Up”. His research findings provide insights that can help teachers change this dynamic:

- Many teachers interact more frequently with students seated in the front or the center of the classroom. Teachers can change this pattern by revising the seating chart or by moving around the classroom during discussions;
- **Numbered Heads Together** is a strategy that can result in greater student involvement as well as higher rates of time on task and overall satisfaction on the part of the teacher and students. The strategy works this way:
  - Students are placed in groups, typically groups of four and each student has a number from one to four
  - The teacher poses a question and the groups of four discuss possible answers/responses
  - The teacher then selects a number from one to four and students with that number can respond to the question

You can read more about **Numbered Heads Together** in *Active Learning and Engagement Strategies* on pages 63-64.

- Some students are “turned off” when the teacher indicates that their response to a question was wrong and they tend to be reluctant to participate. Instead, the teacher can ask the student to share his thinking, let the student know that he was on the right track, or provide a cue to help the student reevaluate his answer;
- Based on Mary Budd Rowe’s research, teachers can practice **Wait Time** (three to five seconds of silence before and after student responses to allow think time). Rowe further concluded that “in the classroom with longer wait time, student responses were three to seven times longer as the students provided evidence and explained their reasoning.”

Adding new practices to one’s repertoire (or dusting off old power tools) can result in more energetic and robust conversations and as Mary Budd Rowe noted the “invisible become more visible.”

### Twitter Post

Tapping into one of today’s popular social media vehicles, this strategy (on the surface) is simple but might require more thinking and analysis because it requires students to be concise but inclusive in their writing. Applying the Twitter construct, students are asked to summarize their thoughts in fewer than 140 characters. Although students might tweet on a regular basis, perhaps they have never been challenged to express their learning Twitter style. After completing their tweet, students can share in small groups or with the entire class.

One of Dale Carnegie’s most popular quotes is, “Knowledge isn’t power until it is applied.” Keep shopping for classroom power tools that can help you and your students grow together as you apply them in the teaching and learning process!



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