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Question Stems & Cubing

We know that different children have different learning preferences. The way you structure questions can instantly exclude some of your students, or it can invite all of them into the process. To be sure you're including everyone, try beginning your questions with a variety of question stems and using a strategy known as cubing.

Cubing uses a simple visual of an easily constructed cube to approach a topic from multiple directions. You can use cubes in different colors to differentiate according to learning modalities.

STEP BY STEP

- First you need to know how many of each kind of cube you're going to make for your class. To figure that out, think about how you'd group your students according to learning modalities. Assuming that each group will have no more than four students, you need to know how many groups of visual learners you have, how many groups of auditory learners, and how many groups of kinesthetic learners.
- Turn to the reproducibles on pages 103–05. Each section of each of these cube patterns has a command. You'll need to add specific instructions to the

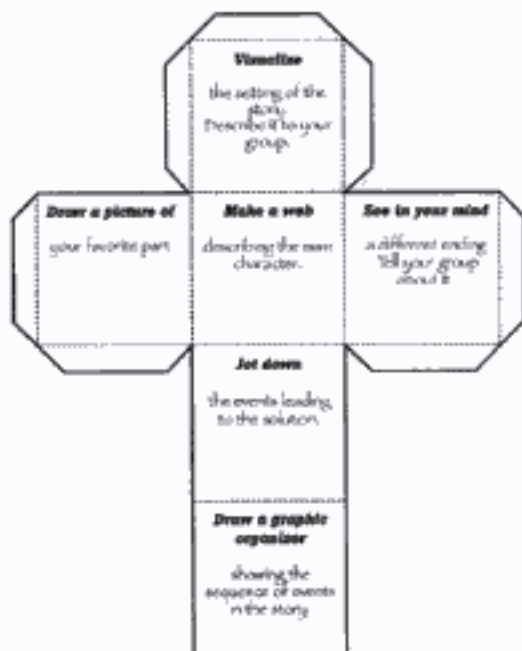
commands to create appropriate tasks for each group.

- Since you may want to come back and re-use the cube patterns later, I'd suggest that your next step should be to make one copy of each of the three learning-styles cubes on plain white paper. Note that you might want to enlarge these on the copier in order to have more room to write.



FOR EXAMPLE

If students have read a narrative, then you might create a cube for visual learners on which the sides read something like this:





- Explain that once each student knows what his task is, he should work on that assignment on his own. However, students can also help each other.
- Finally, ask students to share with one another how they completed their tasks.

VARIATION

Start with the blank cube pattern on page 106 and create new cubes that differentiate by student interests.

NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

You've used the same strategy for the whole group, but you've varied the details to honor each modality preference. As a result, you've dramatically increased each child's chance to become engaged in learning—and that means you've also increased his chances of succeeding.

- Next, on your copies, add specific task instructions to each section of each cube.
- Go back to the copier with the filled-in cube patterns. Make the appropriate number of cube patterns for each learning modality, using a different color of card stock for each type of cube. Let's say you copy the cube for visual learners onto green card stock, the one for auditory learners onto blue stock, and the one for kinesthetic learners onto yellow stock.
- In class, divide the students into the groups you've decided on. Give each group a cube in the appropriate color. Make sure the students understand what each command means.
- Have the students in each group take turns throwing the cube and noting the instructions listed on the part of the cube that lands face up. Explain that if the student doesn't want to perform that task, he can roll the cube a second time.





Differentiated Wait Time

You had the class in your teacher preparation that told you it was important to give students “wait time” after asking a question. Why is that important? Thinking takes time. That doesn’t fit well with the pressure on you today to get in so much instruction in a limited time. The pressure leads to a hurried pace of instruction, and that in turn leads to a hurried environment. Before you realize it, you’re firing questions at your students one right after the other.

I know that in my classroom, because I like to keep things moving, I probably gave my students only a couple of seconds of wait time. What’s worse is that I probably answered most of the questions I asked my students.

I’ll just blame it on my husband. Sometimes when he’s slow to answer, I’ll answer for him. That behavior became a habit that carried over to the students. Does this sound familiar to you—in your home or your classroom? Husbands are probably glad they don’t have to respond, but our students are different. Although they might be glad they don’t have to respond, without sufficient wait time, many students are *unable* to respond. As soon as somebody answers the question, everybody stops thinking.

Finding creative ways to add some wait time to your questioning can make a big difference. That’s where this strategy comes in.



CHEW ON IT

For every 8 to 10 minutes of sage-on-the-stage instruction, ask your students to “chew” or process the information in some way. For example, ask students to:

- pair off and discuss with their partners what they’ve learned.
- participate in a whip—a process of your going around the class and getting quick responses to questions. Just be sure to give your students wait time before you start the whip around.
- play a game such as Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy, or Hollywood Squares.

No matter which of these approaches you use, just be sure to “chunk” the information—giving students manageable amounts of information at one time—and give them a chance to “chew” on it!

STEP BY STEP

- Give students 5 to 10 seconds to respond to a question. Make sure they know that they're expected to use that time to think about their answers.
- Follow a random method for calling on students. Put kids' names on craft sticks and put the craft sticks in a jar, then randomly pull out a stick and ask the child whose name is on that stick to answer the question. Students will learn that they're all responsible for every question.
- Tell students you're not going to call on anyone until more than half of them have raised their hands.
- Occasionally call on students who don't have their hands raised.
- Ask students to explain how they arrived at their responses, whether or not the response is correct. It's the thinking you're after.

NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

When you begin to increase wait time in your whole-group setting, you'll notice that the length of student responses increases and failure to respond decreases. When you become less and less the sage on the stage, students ask more questions and begin to interact with one another. You'll find yourself asking questions at a higher level, especially of those students who can handle that, and you'll find that your students make more inferences and start giving more speculative responses. Speculative responses boost creative thinking.



WHO NEEDS DIFFERENTIATED WAIT TIME?

While additional wait time will increase the quality and depth of the answers in general, some wait time may need to be differentiated. Often boys need more wait time than girls. Some students from poverty need more wait time because they have less background knowledge and limited vocabulary. Often English-language learners need additional time to process thoughts in their first language and then to translate into English. Many students with identified learning disabilities need additional time to process and reflect before giving a response.

But what about those students at the other end of the spectrum—the ones you perceive to be highly able? It may surprise you to know that retrieval rates and intelligence are not linked. Sometimes those highly able students in your room have neural networks that are much denser, and their thoughts and responses are more complex (Kingore, 2004). If you call only on the students whose hands are up in the air first, you and your class will miss the deeper thoughts of some of these students.