

Alternatives to Hand-Raising

Asking children to answer questions by raising their hands is a very ineffective way of engaging learners. Many young children do not have the self-control to learn this routine, and the children who don't get to answer don't learn much. Children learn by answering, talking, writing, doing. Instead of hand-raising, try the following techniques instead. Be sure to teach the procedures for each one carefully before trying them out!

Turn and Talk

After the question is asked, pairs of children turn to each other. One listens while the other answers. This way half of the class is engaged in talking, and it is easier for children to pay attention to the speaker in a paired situation. Be sure that children know ahead of time who their partner is and that they practice how to pair up. This should move quickly, so keep the pace brisk. This works well for reading lessons when you want children to think and share their ideas.

Choral Responses

To increase student engagement and reinforce simple concepts, allow the children to respond all together. This works best for questions with one answer, and as a quick review of previously covered material. You can cue children to respond with a hand signal.

Cold call

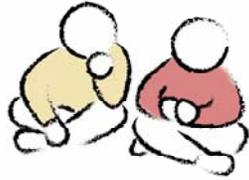
Keep a list of children's names, put their names on cards, or sticks, and randomly pick children's names to answer. This helps to improve the pace of the lesson, and keeps children engaged and ready to answer since they don't know when they will be called on. It also ensures that all children get a chance to participate and a few children are not dominating the discussions. Keep it positive. This should not be humiliating or embarrassing. Make sure that the children are able to be successful with the content you are reviewing.

Individual whiteboards

Each child has a whiteboard and marker and they write down his or her answer to the question. Children hold up their boards so the teacher can judge how well the children are understanding the concepts. This works especially well for math problems.

Post the following sign in your group meeting area to remind you to try these different techniques, especially when you see the children are starting to lose focus.

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Turn and Talk



Choral Responses



Cold Calling



Individual White Boards