

20. NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER

Approx. duration: 30-45 min

Groups of: 4-6

Competencies involved: Listening, Speaking

Level: all

Required Material:

·Whiteboard or notebook

·Laptop (optional)

Description

This strategy was initially designed for science content, but it can easily be adapted to ESL. It is a cooperative learning activity where students in small groups are assigned individual numbers and are called out by number to answer questions. It can serve as an excellent way to pick up the pace in a slow class by getting the students immediately engaged by keeping them on their toes throughout the activity. Unsurprisingly, the Numbered Heads Together activity can: “[...] increase active student engagement, enhance interpersonal relationships, and improve student learning”. [1]

The first step of this activity is to give group members (groups of 5-6, ideally all the same size) a different number. It's important to explain to the students why they are being assigned a number so they are prepared to react when the teacher calls one out. Then, the teacher can give the students their assignment, which usually is an open question, and give them a time limit to answer it within their group. All teams must also prepare at least three points to support their answer. [2]

Next, once the time is up, the teacher calls out a random number (between 1 and 5 or 6), for example, “All ‘1s’ please stand up!”. [2] All students with the called-out number should stand up (optional) and one at a time, state their group's answer to the question loudly and clearly. If saying an answer out loud is too intimidating for the students, the teacher can instead prepare multiple choice or true/false questions and ask the students to “use cue cards or sheets of paper with printed answers on them (A/B/C/D/E; True/False).” [2]

Once all team representatives have spoken, the teacher should “[...] prompt groups to debate their responses with each other” using the arguments (points) they have prepared.

The collective recap can usually be a simple final round where student representatives sum up what they have learned through the activity.



Preparation

TEACHER

- Topic selection and question preparation
- Assessment and/or feedback tool preparation (optional)
- Answer cards preparation (optional)
- Activity instructions
- Team formation

STUDENTS

- Review of the evaluation criteria (if applicable)

Workflow

TEACHER

1. Gives the activity instructions.
2. Asks the first question.
3. Calls out a number.
4. Walks around the classroom to verify the students' progress.
5. Ensures transitions between sets and asks the next questions.
6. Proceeds to a collective recap.
7. Completes the evaluation (if applicable).

STUDENTS

1. Answer the question and prepare three arguments as a team.
2. Answer the questions in front of the whole class (one student per team).
3. Take part in the final collective recap.
4. Self-evaluate or evaluate their team (optional).

Evaluation options

TEACHER

- Formative or summative assessment of the answers and the overall group effort using evaluation criteria that have previously been shared with the students

STUDENTS

- Formative or summative assessment of the team's work or self-evaluation, based on the teacher's criteria

Tips

- This strategy is especially useful with multiple-choice questions where there is more than one reasonable response, or even multiple correct answers because groups need to defend their reasoning and they get to see alternative responses. [2]

[1] Kagan, S., & Kagan, M. (2009). Kagan's cooperative learning. San Clemente, CA: Kagan.

[2] Centre for Teaching Excellence. (2020). Active learning strategies. Capilano University. <https://cte.capilano.ca/resources/alo/>