

# THE #1 PROBLEM

NOT KNOWING IF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS ARE LEARNING



The problem is this: In a class of multiple individuals, it is not straight-forward to find out how successfully each individual person is learning, identifying what their difficulties or gaps are and then to use that information to close their learning gaps with appropriate responses.

<https://teacher-head.com/2019/10/04/the-1-problem-weakness-in-teaching-and-how-to-address-it/>

## TEACHER MINDSET

**Problem** | Mindsets determine practice. So, if you're satisfied when only some students succeed in learning, you will seriously restrict the horizons you set for the majority in your class. Ideally aim for all students to learn all the material. Reality will differ but the results will improve.



**Solution** | A switch in mindset moves from "Does anyone know?" to "Does everyone know?" and "Can anyone do it?" to "Can everyone do it?" — a switch from searching for mere self affirmation to regularly seeking out errors and difficulties in your students.

## INEFFECTIVE TESTING OR CHECKING PROTOCOLS

**Problem** | Explaining something doesn't in itself mean students have understood. So unless the teacher checks for this, they are likely to assume all is well. Asking for volunteers — "who knows the answer?" — tells you nothing about the majority of students, only the favoured few.



**Solution** | The goal of the teacher should be one of 'all knowing all'. This can only happen with a comprehensive repertoire of retrieval practice techniques that involving all students. Use processes that enable all students to self-check they know all the knowledge.

## EXPOSITION WITHOUT CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

**Problem** | Even an engaging explanation from a knowledgeable teacher doesn't safeguard students from confusion and misconceptions. This is a trap even for the very experienced and often charismatic teacher. Maybe even more so, given how engaged the students look.



**Solution** | By positively doubting the effectiveness of your explanation, you will remember to integrate checking for understanding into your sequence. Sample students' understanding by asking them to summarise what they've heard. And support them by probing further.

## WEAK QUESTIONING OR RESPONSE TECHNIQUES

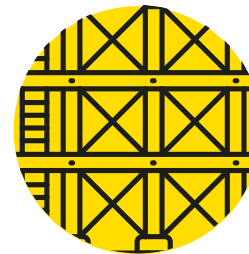
**Problem** | Ensure your questioning provides a representative sample of your class. Don't rely on 2 or 3 students for feedback on the effectiveness of your explanation. So, obviously, avoid *hands up* or *call out* questioning. Identify and support the low-confident, shy students.



**Solution** | Change your view of the purpose of questioning. Shift it to being to provide you with feedback. So make Cold Call and Think, Pair, Share an integral part of your routine. Give all students this chance to rehearse their thinking and hear what it sound like.

## EXCESSIVE SCAFFOLDING

**Problem** | Equating task completion with learning is an insidious error. Neat diagrams and handwriting are not an indication of understanding. Scaffolds can create these situations as teacher and students let the glow of completion blind them to the thornier issue of understanding.



**Solution** | Make the explicit switch to understanding, not mere completion. Circulate to look for points that need re-teaching. A powerful strategy is 'books closed and check'. Anticipating this, students will learn to process the content more thoroughly — it's all self-generated.

## POOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

**Problem** | Another common assumption is that introducing new vocabulary will invariably result in its assimilation by students. Not so. With this superficial approach, some students won't even be able to say or read the word. Repeated rehearsal activities are essential.



**Solution** | Design in the deliberate teaching, practice and testing of new vocabulary. Engineer activities where all students say the new words and practise using them in sentences, reading them and recalling them in subsequent retrieval practice.