Defined Academy

STRATEGY GUIDE
Need to Knows

PURPOSE

This is a strategy for launching and sustaining inquiry. Through this process, your students will generate questions at the start of a learning experience to organize their thinking about what they don't yet know. Please note that there are several variations for this process.

STEPS

Part 1 - Question Generation

1. Create a space to record student responses in your learning space. This could be an electronic document or a poster on the wall of your classroom.
2. Ask your students to create a t-chart in their notebook. Label one side "Know" and the other side "Need to Know"
3. At the start of a learning experience and after getting some information regarding the overall context, ask your students to identify what they know about the project or challenge and what they feel like they need to know. You might model a few responses: "I know how to publish a video on YouTube." "I need to know who my audience is." "I know the parts of our government." "I don't know the roles of the various members of the House of Representatives." Allow 3-5 minutes for individuals to record their thinking.
4. Ask your students to share their "Need to Knows" with a partner or small group. They should note the questions they have in common.
5. Facilitate a whole group discussion in which students share questions their classmates asked. Chart these in the space you created at the start of the session.
6. Prepare to use these questions to drive learning, or provide context to lessons you have already planned. (See Part 2)

Part 2 - Using Need to Knows to Sustain Inquiry

- BEFORE A KEY LESSON: make the original list generated by your class visible to the class. Note verbally one of the Need to Knows from the list. For example, "We said that we aren't sure who our audience might be for our YouTube videos.

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Let's spend some time analyzing these issues to consider the possible stakeholders."

- AFTER A KEY LESSON OR A FEW KEY LESSONS: revisit the Need to Know list with your class. Ask your students to identify what they've learned with a partner or small group. Then, annotate the list - a check mark means they have solutions, a strike through means the question is no longer relevant, circling means that the question is now a high priority. Then, ask students to share any new questions they have. Add these to the list.
- AT THE END OF A PROJECT: As part of the reflection/celebration process, ask students to revisit the Need to Know list to identify the progress they have made. Make note of the questions that weren't answered. You have some options for these. Here are a few ideas (but don't feel limited to these):
    - Allow students to note that they weren't relevant and discuss the importance of weighing the relevance of questions. In every project in our lives, we realize that there are things we may not need to learn in order to complete the project.
    - Ask students who are interested to take those questions on for independent study and report back what they have learned.
    - Save the questions and build future projects around them.
    - Use the questions to create choice boards for days when you have a substitute teacher.

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