

The Effects of Rippling Prompts

TEACHER: What I want you to do now is to sort of think through your process today.

NARRATOR: TPTs are based on two essential concepts: the ripple and quadrant 4. The ripple is a method for presenting a question or a prompt, in a way that engages every student at the same time. It was developed to replace the limited engagement of a traditional Q&A, where hands are raised, a volunteer is chosen, and the teacher interacts with a single student at a time.

WILLIAM: When a teacher is using a traditional Q&A approach to instruction, he or she is only hearing from that one student during that lesson and has no idea how the other students are processing or understanding that information.

TEACHER: If you're in a class where maybe it's a lecture—where the teacher asks the questions, one student answers—as soon as the hands go up, the children who don't have their hands up kind of go on a little break. So, they're not engaged, and they're not involved, and that doesn't promote their learning.

WILLIAM: Conversely, if that teacher is rippling their instruction, they're going to be hearing from all students throughout that lesson, and it's not just that one student that they're going to be getting information regarding how they're processing the information.

NAR: Let's look at how the ripple works.

PÉRSIDA: If we use the analogy of a ripple, and we picture the question being the pebble, and we throw the pebble into the pond, that first plunk, it represents the individual student responding to the prompt, and then it ripples out. The first ripple outside of the initial plunk would be pairs or smalls groups responding to prompts. And then the larger or outer ripple would be the whole class. So, it's the opposite of a traditional Q&A.

NAR: The second essential concept of TPTs focuses on the quality of learning taking place—dividing activities into quadrants measuring participation and depth of learning.

PÉRSIDA: If you go to quadrant one, you're looking at lower-order thinking and low participation. Typically that would be one-word answers, memorization, all that stuff. Quadrant two is a lot of fluff. It's fun, it's a whole lot of participation, but not a lot of higher-order thinking. Students had a good time, but they will not remember what they learned. Quadrant three is where you've got just a few students participating in, perhaps, a discussion that involves higher-order thinking, but you have no evidence that the rest of the class is participating. Two or three students are really dominating the conversation. And quadrant four is where you have the whole class participating using higher-order thinking. It sounds really difficult, but with the right techniques, it can be done.

MICHELLE TRASBORG: Understanding how all four quadrants work, and the different types of engagement and the higher-level thinking that's involved in the engagement, I think is really the key to the total participation techniques, and understanding all of that at its base level.

JENNIFER REINHART: You can definitely see your more successful teachers, your teachers who are having students perform better, are in that fourth quadrant, definitely higher cognition, higher engagement; it's going to take them a lot further.