

Why use the “Uniform Torture Method” in your classroom by Wendy Conway

The Uniform Torture Method is just my way of saying call on almost every student, by name, in almost every class. I’ve found it benefits students, learning and the classroom dynamics. It is also an aid to formative assessment. It increases in-class participation, timely homework completion and attendance.

The student has content and non-content benefits. One content benefit is seeing if you understood the lectured procedure, prior to getting home and realizing you misunderstood a subtle step, also seeing if you can even start a problem on your own. Often a student will report the most frequently occurring wrong answer; this is a great opportunity to address common mistakes in a timely fashion. I have found that students participating in this type of lecture are more likely to keep up with the homework.

Non-content benefits include learning to speak in front of a group. Students are encouraged to give an answer or a next step or verbalize where they got stuck, occasionally they can even respond with an IDK. All of these answers are treated as valuable for formative assessment, both to let the instructor see how long it takes the students to complete a problem or whether they are lost and need more examples before they can attack on their own. As stated above common wrong answers can be addressed. It’s good to point out to students if they can’t start the problem in class, they won’t be able to start it at home. Walk and check by the teacher is beneficial to get those students who want to be passive note takers on task.

I have seen better grades and better attendance using this method. AKA increased learning through participation and attendance.

This method fosters a positive classroom dynamic. Many students have told me that all though they were initially afraid to respond in class, that they ended up loving this procedure. It is a busy engaged inter-active classroom. You do not fall into that pattern of one or two students answering every question. Another benefit is calling on students makes it easier to learn names. It’s much easier to redirect inappropriate classroom behavior if you know the students by name. For instance, “Jennifer are you texting right now?” Has a big impact.

Implementation takes a little forethought. You need to inflate your syllabus points slightly, so you can “pay” your students a couple of points /class for participation. Stress that attendance is not the same as participation. Discuss with the class on day one the method (they think “Uniform Torture Method” is humorous) and the benefits of wrong answers or IDK’s. Start the procedure on the first day of class and stick to it. Call on students by the attendance sheet. Make yourself a chart of where they sit on day one. This is not a seating chart but a name/memory aid. Students have a tendency to sit in the same seat. (Sociology concept-*eminent domain*) The next classes call in anti-alphabet order and update the seating chart. By day three try using your chart and calling on students by rows or columns. The names start coming pretty easily.

Try torturing your students; I think you’ll like it. ☺