INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES



Five Whys

This problem-solving strategy allows students to analyze a problem in order to find its root cause. Students are prompted to actively reflect on and examine the problem, while teachers passively facilitate.

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FIVE WHYS

Summary

A key component of problem-solving is finding the root cause. Here, teachers ask, "Why?" five times, shifting to students the responsibility of finding the source of a problem.

Procedure

1. Have students begin by identifying the problem. Make sure all students understand the problem clearly.
2. Ask students why the problem is occurring. Focus on answers that are grounded in fact, and show a cause-and-effect relationship. Record student answers succinctly in a space where the class can see them, such as on a poster or whiteboard space.
3. Turn students' responses of causes into newly identified "problems," as in step 1, and prompt students to find further causes of these problems. Ask why these problems are occurring. Try to distinguish causes from symptoms.
4. Repeat, asking, "Why?" three more times to focus on drilling down to the root cause.
5. If you reach a place in the discussion where students can no longer find a valid response, they have found a root cause.
6. Once a root cause is identified, develop a plan to address it.

Adapted from: The Mind Tools Content Team. (2017). 5 Whys: Getting to the Root of a Problem Quickly. Emerald Works. Retrieved from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_5W.htm