

A Good IDEA for Learning

Ever walked out of class with that elated feeling where you just know you taught a good class? Perhaps a student or two even said something to you afterwards or paid you the supreme accolade with the text “U dun good.” But did you? And while your students might have felt euphoric afterwards, did they learn anything? And, more importantly, can you prove it?

By way of background, most of us know the Nosich (2001) strategy of how to introduce a “fundamental and powerful concept” (*Learning to Think Things Through*, Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson, 40). S-E-E-I (sometimes called the SEE-ing I) is a critical thinking process for clarifying a concept, wherein students are asked to:

- **State** the term
- **Elaborate** on it (in your own words, not the instructor’s or the textbook’s)
- **Exemplify** (find an example not used by text or teacher)
- **Illustrate** it (with a metaphor, simile, analogy, a diagram, or a concept map [34]).

The Nosich strategy is usually used when you first present a new concept to your class. Some instructors use it immediately after introducing the term, though SEE-I can be an excellent class closer for evaluating whether students grasped the notion or even homework.

We have, however, a complementary strategy for that end-of-class assessment when you really want to find out if your students learned something.

IDEA is another four-step critical thinking assessment that provides you with instant feedback, not only on whether students are picking up on what you are broadcasting but also whether they are achieving any kind of deep learning. In specific, IDEA helps you determine whether students can transfer concepts from the classroom into other areas of life.

Here’s how IDEA works. As with the SEE-I, stop class five to ten minutes before the final bell, and ask your students to write down four things:

- **Identify** an important concept you learned (at some level) today.
- **Describe** why you think the concept is important.
- **Elaborate** what questions the new concept brings to mind.
- **Apply** the concept to some area in your life.

Students don’t have to write much, for a little tells you a lot. And there’s a bonus. Having students go through this four-step process actually helps to embed the process deeper in their minds.

Importantly, while a simple IDEA provides a victory for both you and your students, it also can confirm for you that some learning did or did not take place.

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