

Teach More, Hover Less. Lessons from Secondary Education



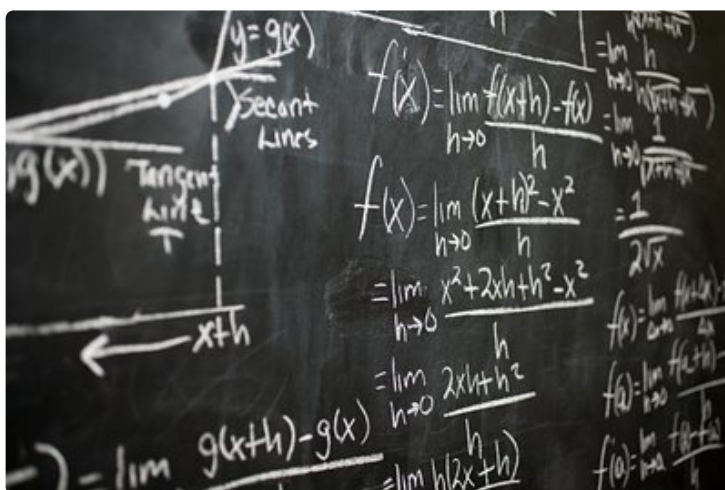
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Helicopter Teaching

"Helicopter teaching" is a phrase coined by Miriam Plotinsky, a secondary school teacher in Maryland, USA.

She describes this phenomenon as a form of micromanagement where the teacher is "controlling every single aspect of instruction."

Helicopter teaching is often driven by fear that without the teacher's control, the curriculum will fall apart, pacing will be off and students will be less focused. However, it can also signalise to students that teachers don't trust them.



To support more inclusive class discussions, Plotinsky suggests giving each student one or two index cards. After

speaking, they throw their card into the middle of the room and listen to others.

See also [Think Pair Share](#)

Signs of a micromanaged classroom

There are three obvious symptoms of a micromanaged classroom, according to Plotinsky.

1. **An overpacked agenda:** This is when teachers have every moment of a class planned out and often more. "We probably won't get to all of this, but..." is a common phrase.
2. **Little student talk:** This happens when most of the class is devoted to silent work or teacher talk. Some educators and administrators assume that a quiet classroom is a well-managed and productive classroom, but Plotinsky disagrees.
3. **Discussions dominated by only a few students:** This is when a class features frequent dialogue but mainly between the teacher and a few vocal students, while others act as observers.

Plotinsky said she was guilty of all three of these early in her career. Discussions in her class, for example, often involved a small group of students expressing ideas similar to her own. Yet 25 of the students in the room might not have said a word.

Student Feedback

Requesting and using student feedback is a key part of Plotinsky's concept of hover-free teaching. She likes to ask students three things in every unit:

1. **What they already know**
2. **How they learn best**
3. **What has worked and what hasn't in the class or in the past**

Those questions can be asked through [e-polling](#) or through simple feedback strategies like [the minute paper](#). Plotinsky would share with students what they collectively said worked and didn't work and how she was integrating that

feedback into class plans. She couldn't always make requested changes, but she said that being transparent made students more engaged



What strategies do you use to avoid micromanaging your classes? Do you find it a challenge to step back and plan less? How might the idea of 'hovering less' translate to online teaching? Let us know in the comments below

