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Questioning Techniques

‘Teaching is the art of asking questions’ Socrates

Some general thoughts…

- Thinking is not driven by answers, it is driven by questions. The stimulation for the learner is greatly enhanced by questions, preferably without the answers being known, thereby creating a shared learning experience
- Research by people like Ted Wragg tells us that many of the questions we ask require very little thought and that on average we give learners less than three seconds to answer them. The research has found that increasing the wait time improves the number and quality of the responses; three seconds for lower-order questions and ten seconds for higher-order questions. Research also tells us that teachers ask two questions every minute, up to 400 a day, 70,000 a year and two to three million in a life time![i]
- Establishing a culture in the classroom that encourages learners to ask questions of their teacher and of each other is very important. In addition teachers need to develop their own questioning techniques if lessons are to be challenging and thought provoking. Thinking about a question engages the mind in a unique way, if questions are not asked then learning will be shallow and superficial.
- Experience shows that getting the key questions right takes a lot of thought, but done successfully shapes the lesson and ensures that discussion is challenging and open ended. It also enables the teacher to direct and control the discussion even if it goes in an unexpected direction Good lesson planning therefore needs to include a list of the questions the teacher intends to ask plus a good lesson is one where the learners ask more questions than the teacher.
- The kinds of questions the teacher asks will reveal to the learner the kind of thinking that is expected of them

Purposes of questioning

- To interest, engage and challenge pupils
- To check on prior knowledge
- To assess pupils’ progress against learning objectives

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Effective questioning

- Questions are planned and closely linked to the learning objectives
- Closed questions are used to check factual understanding and recall
- Open questions predominate
- The cognitive level increases as the questions go on
- Pupils have opportunities to ask their own questions and seek their own answers
- The classroom climate is one where pupils feel secure and are prepared to take risks and make mistakes.

Bloom's Taxonomy

The use of Bloom's Taxonomy is an excellent tool for developing an understanding of the different levels of questioning. The Thinking Process Cues and Skills demonstrated by using this tool are explained in greater detail in the *Curriculum of Opportunity: Potential into Performance*

Bloom's Taxonomy: Thinking Process Cues

Lower level questions

Knowledge	Say what you know, what you remember. Describe, repeat, define, identify. Tell who, when, where, which what.
Comprehension	Describe in your own words. Tell how you feel about it. Say what it means; explain; compare; relate
Application	How can you use it? Where does it lead you? Apply what you know; use it to solve problems. Demonstrate

Higher level questions

Analysis	What are the parts? The order? The reasons why? The causes? The problems? The solutions? The consequences?
Synthesis	How might it be different? How else? What if? Suppose? Develop. Improve. Create in your own way.
Evaluation	How would you judge it? Does it succeed? Will it work? What would you prefer? Why do you think so?

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Skills Demonstrated Include:

Knowledge	Observation and recall of information. Awareness of major ideas. Mastery of subject matter
Comprehension	Understanding of information. Grasp meaning, interpret facts. Order and predict consequences.
Application	Use information, use methods, concepts, theories in a new situation. Solve problems using required skills/knowledge
Analysis	Seeing patterns, organisation of parts; recognition of hidden meanings; identification of components
Synthesis	Use of old ideas to create new ones. Generalise from given facts. Relate knowledge from several areas, predict, draw conclusions.
Evaluation	Compare and discriminate between ideas; assess value of theories. Make choice based on reasoned argument, verify value of evidence, recognise subjectivity.

(NB We have used the 'traditional' Bloom's Taxonomy rather than the newer version)

Examples of different types of questions…which ones are higher order questions?

- Why save the whale?
- What is invisible?
- How many ways are there to find out the time?
- What would happen if sweets were free?
- What is bravery?
- If a dog could talk what questions would you like to ask it?
- What makes a good joke?
- Is lying ever justified?
- What will computers never be able to do?
- Which character from fiction would you like to have as a best friend?

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- The solution is use only water, what is the problem?
- Why is Harry Potter popular?
- How are animals different from humans?
- What colour is time?
- Who is your hero?
- Is it wrong to pick wild flowers?
- Is rugby dangerous?
- How would you measure the weight of your own head?
- Is the environment a bigger crisis than poverty?
- Why do people still buy fountain pens?

'We learn by asking questions. We learn better by asking better questions. We learn more by having the opportunity to ask more questions'

Morgan and Sexton

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