

Getting started with effective questioning

Transcription: What is effective questioning?

Interviewees:

Dr Liz Taylor

Education consultant

Steve Burnage

Education consultant

What is effective questioning and why do we need it?

Dr Liz Taylor

From the point of view of learners, I think effective questioning is going to be something that makes them think. So, we can think of it as part of the active learning experience. And of course, it also dovetails with assessment for learning. So, there are multiple purposes that help us to use questioning effectively.

Steve Burnage

Of course, there's lots of different and valid reasons why teachers use questioning. So, for example, it helps us to focus on the topic and draw out learners' knowledge and curiosity. It can guide deepening and extended thinking and learning. It could help us to check understanding so that we can use it to adapt our content or the pace of our delivery, or the style of our delivery to meet learners' needs. We can identify gaps in learning or misconceptions about learning, and of course we can use it to support and scaffold learning as learners might lead towards their goals, to help them make connections and also help them make the next steps in their learning.

Dr Liz Taylor

So effective questioning has benefits for both the learner and for the teacher. From the learner's point of view effective questioning is helping with that process of learning; it's enabling them to think, it's enabling them to explore, to retrieve their knowledge, to express their knowledge, to communicate. And sometimes it's the case when we're talking to somebody that we actually almost learn things that we didn't know we knew already. So, it's enabling that process to happen.

Steve Burnage

I would say that questioning is one of the essential parts of any effective teacher's toolkit, as I call it. Alongside formative, positive feedback, questioning, I would say, is highlighted by the likes of John Hattie or the Education Endowment Foundation as being in the top five of effective teacher strategies. So, in terms of what it is, it's really about what it does that's more important because it helps learners consolidate, deepen and extend their thinking and learning. And when done well, it encourages them to think hard, not just about the answers but about the learning process itself. And of course, the key part of the phrase I've just used is "when it's done well", because so often we try to do good questioning, effective questioning, but we don't always know what it looks like. And that's about being clear about the purpose of questions, because that can help all of us frame the questions more carefully.

Dr Liz Taylor

Effective questioning from the purpose of the teacher, I think, really fits in with that umbrella of assessment for learning, so assessment for learning is sometimes a lot bigger than we think it is. Sometimes we just think it's about that end outcome. But actually, there's many different things which fit into the umbrella of assessment for learning and questioning is one of them.

Good questioning enables both the student to reflect, but also the teacher to find out what it is at the moment that the students know, whether there are any gaps in their knowledge, whether there are any misconceptions, and that then helps the teacher direct the future path of the lesson. So, we can think of feedback not just going from the teacher to the student, but importantly going from the student to the teacher. And then of course, the teacher needs to act on that feedback so that they actually close the feedback loop.

Steve Burnage

Well, I said at the start of this video that effective questioning was all about when questioning is done well. We could say that the route to a good answer is actually good questions, and getting questions right is about two things: It's about asking the right questions and asking questions right.

So, there are many resources available to support teachers in adding to their effective questioning toolkit, including our "Getting Started With" guide. Spending time planning effective questioning and teaching learners how to answer them effectively, and also how to ask their own questions, is time well spent, since effective questioning is at the very heart of effective learning.

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