

Getting started with effective questioning

Transcription: What are some examples?

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What are some examples of good practice?

Dr Liz Taylor

There's so many different questioning strategies that we can use and of course, they are all good for different things. So, it's a matter of "What is our purpose?" And then we find the right strategy to mesh with that purpose.

Steve Burnage

Questioning shouldn't be a one-way process. Sometimes we see questioning as always teacher to student. Now, of course, effective questioning is actually a three-way process; it's teacher to student, student to teacher and also student to student. So, an effective learning environment should be buzzing with questions as well as curriculum.

Dr Liz Taylor

So, one of the challenges with questioning is to make sure that we hear from as many members of the class as possible so that perhaps the old view of "hands up" questioning where we're just hearing from one or two students perhaps repeatedly isn't actually very helpful for that assessment for learning purpose.

What we want to be doing is getting answers from as many children in the class as we can. So that's where something like mini whiteboards can be really helpful. If we've got a short, closed question that we want answering, then they can hold up the answer, we can immediately see who has got that right, who is not quite sure, where we need to go over it. Or also, we can do things like Don't ask One, ask Five so instead of just picking on one student, calling on one

student, we quickly repeat that to a number of students so that everybody's engaged, they are all wanting to contribute, and nobody can just sit there without being part of the lesson.

Steve Burnage

It's trying to use questions that start (in English) with a W or an H: What, Why, Where, When, Which, How. So, for example, a history teacher might use a sequence of questions when talking about events that led to the start of World War I, so they might say, "What were the events that led to the start of World War I?" / "Why did each of these events contribute to a rise in hostilities?" / "How did each of these events escalate the start of the war?"

And what I'd like teachers to notice here is there's a progression from a question that's focused on factual knowledge, "What", to questions that require students to evaluate, "Why" and analyse "How". So, in other words, the questions progress from the bottom of Bloom's Taxonomy to the very top.

Dr Liz Taylor

So, there are also creative, open ended approaches to questioning. A good example of that would be something like "See, Think, Wonder" from the Harvard Project Zero. And the way that works is that we have some sort of intriguing image, perhaps, that we put up to do with our subject and the purpose of that lesson. And then we ask the students to reflect on what they can see in that image. And we get them to look at all the detail of it and then what they think about it. So, we're starting to get opinions and then what they wonder about it, which is a lovely stage because they start to think creatively, to conjecture and to consider just the possibilities of that photograph or whatever resource it is. And that can enable them to get some more extended answers, to get speculative talk going.

We of course, need to give them some wait time so that they've actually thought through their answer before they speak. So, "See, Think, Wonder" can be great at getting that more extended, creative response.

So sometimes we want to use short, closed-answer retrieval practice questions, sometimes we want to encourage creative questioning approaches. Just depends on our purpose.

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