Asking Effective Questions: Guidelines for Teachers

Video handout

Why are questions important?

* Promote higher order thinking skills including:
* Analysis
* Evaluation
* Reflection
* Justification
* Synthesis
* Give students the opportunity to address the specific features of the assessment design criteria at the highest possible level.

What are some of the dangers in questioning?

* Using too many closed questions.
* Asking questions that only need *yes / no* answers.
* Using double barrelled questions. These are questions which include two elements to be answered, e.g*. Is this book interesting and relevant*?
* Asking questions that ask students to recall rather than analyse.
* Asking leading questions. These are questions that give students clues to the answer that you want, e.g. *There are many differences between the two texts, aren’t there?*
* Not giving students time to think before answering the questions (wait time).

How can I promote higher order critical thinking skills?

Questions are often asked at a recall/comprehension level which does not allow students to demonstrate critical thinking skills. Using elements from models such as Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom 1956; Anderson and Krathwohl 2001) and Costa’s Levels of Critical Thinking (Costa 1985) teachers can plan and formulate questions or alternatives to questions that focus on higher order thinking skills. This will also give students the opportunity to demonstrate the specific features of the assessment design criteria at the highest possible level.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Level | Costa’s Levels of Critical Thinking | Bloom’s Taxonomy | Key words / language functions | Examples of questions | Alternatives to questions |
| Higher Order Thinking Skills | **Level 3**  **Output**  Applying and evaluating information | **Creating**  *Can the student:*  *-create new points of view or products*  *-combine ideas in an innovative manner?* | Design  Combine  Predict  Change | *Is there evidence that it would be better if there were more female members of parliament?* | *What do you think might happen if the situation changes?* |
| **Evaluating**  *Can the student:*  *-justify a decision?*  *-judge ideas according to criteria or standards?* | Evaluate  Justify  Assess  Support | *What is your opinion of the current situation in India?* | *Give some examples to support your ideas.* |
| **Level 2**  **Processing**  Processing and understanding information | **Analysing**  *Can the student:*  *-compare different texts?*  *-outline relationships between parts?* | Analyse  Compare  Examine  Explain | *What examples can you give to explain the main issues?* | *Please identify and describe the aspects of gender equality which you researched for your chosen country.* |
| **Applying**  *Can the student:*  *-demonstrate understanding in a new way?*  *- use the ideas in a similar situation?* | Demonstrate  Develop  Plan  Organise | *What aspect of gender equality have you researched and was it interesting?* |  |
| Lower Order Thinking Skills | **Level 1**  **Input**  Gathering, identifying and remembering information | **Understanding**  *Can the student:*  *-describe ideas?*  *-paraphrase information?* | Summarise  Illustrate  Restate  Classify | *What is the current situation?*  *So what’s the issue here?* |  |
| **Remembering**  *Can the student:*  *-remember information?*  *-define facts?* | Describe  Who  Where  List | *How many women were elected in the election?*  *Is there a rule or a law that says there should be more?*  *In what country are you talking about?* |  |

Where to from here?

* Scaffolding the task with your students can benefit them and assist you in your planning. Following these steps can help students identify the rhetorical patterns and language involved in these types of tasks:
* Deconstruct a model of a discussion. Focus on successful elements such as questions used, what these questions are asking students to produce and student responses. If possible, use a video / audio recording in addition to a written transcript so aspects of non-verbal communication can also be highlighted.
* Show an example of a discussion that isn’t successful due to questions asked and student responses. Students collaboratively reconstruct the discussion using the successful elements identified previously.
* Student practice their discussions with a partner. Peer evaluation could be built into this task by having pairs observe and give feedback to each other.
* Plan your questions before the discussion based on the specific features of the assessment design criteria. Check that they match the ideas in the table above. You can find templates to use on the SACE website ([*Discussions used in Assessments- Checklists for Teachers and Students*](https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/722147/Discussions+used+in+Assessment+checklist+for+teachers+and+students.docx/454a7fa0-6039-4859-a8c0-fa769355880d?v=1)).
* Record a discussion with a student. Analyse the questions you use based on the following table. Do they reflect the outcomes you desire?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Purpose for asking question | Question | What type of question is it? | Student response | My evaluation |
| *I want to find out if the student can evaluate the evidence they found out about their topic.* | ***Did you find out about your topic?*** | Closed question | Short – “*yes”* | Closed question did not work as well as I would have liked. Possible alternatives –  *Which reading provided you with the most useful evidence? Why?* |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

References

Anderson, LW & Krathwohl, DR (eds) 2001, *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: a revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*, Longman, New York.

Bloom, B, Englehart, M, Furst, E, Hill, W & Krathwohl, D 1956, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: the classification of educational goals*. *Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*, David McKay, New York.

Costa, AL "Toward a Model of Human Intellectual Functioning" In A. Costa (ed.) 1985 *Developing Minds,* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Development.