

Encouraging Questioning as a Tool for Thinking and Learning

Teachers have good intentions when they pose questions to their students. Hopefully, their questions not only prompt thinking but also provide a scaffold and a model for students so that they will begin asking questions of themselves. However, this is not always the case. Questioning is frequently used primarily as a tool to assess students. While students' responses to questions provide the teacher with valuable data, an overreliance of using questioning for this purpose diminishes the value of questioning as a means to prompt thinking and exploration. Furthermore, students are likely to perceive questioning as something someone does to them rather than a behavior they should do for themselves. The problem is exasperated when neither teachers nor students understand the purpose of the questions. Puig (2013) urges teachers to "stop the insanity" of asking too many questions. Rather than focus on questioning as a means to assess, he encourages the use of questioning as a means to assist. In other words, assist students in understanding that questioning is a tool *they* can use to propel *their* learning.

Shifting some of the responsibility of questioning from the teacher to the student takes some thought and action. Research indicates that students rarely pose the types of questions in class that demonstrate their desire to learn. Traditionally, both teachers and students perceive the role of the teacher is to ask questions and the role of the student is to respond. Below are some ways teachers can help shift the responsibility of questioning from the teacher to the students.

Collaborative question generating. When introducing a new subject, place students in small groups and have each group generate questions they want answered by the time you've covered the topic in full, and share the questions in a class discussion.

Use a "think aloud" to share genuine questions you have while reading, listening, or viewing new information. Make sure students understand that you are sharing aloud questions you have rather than prompting them to answer the questions.

Never devalue irrelevant or silly questions from a student. Instead respond positively by exploring (briefly) the reasons why they may have asked the questions.

Foster curiosity and questioning by providing powerful stimuli. Use picture books, photographs, artifacts and works of art. Show video clips that touch the heart while conveying information. Read a provocative text.

Create a notebook titled, "I'm Wondering" to record your questions and periodically share some of your questions with students. Have students create their own notebooks and share their questions with one another.

Focus on questions not answers. Show that you value questioning for its' own sake. You don't always have to know the answer. Unanswerable questions are valuable too.

Allow plenty of thinking time after asking, "Do you have any questions?"

Give students time to write down their questions and explore them with one another.

Brainstorm and grow questions. Keep track of them by using bubbl.us or any other online mind-mapping tool.

Create a culture of inquiry. Encourage exploration, wondering and questioning by posing meaningful, real-life problems.

Share your questions. By doing so, students learn that asking questions is not a sign of weakness. **Provide a strong provocation, stimulus or hook** to get students thinking, wondering, and questioning then step back and have them share and respond to one another.

Encourage student to student questions and responses by withholding your own response and asking, “Who would like to respond to . . . ?”

Provide positive responses to student questions such as, “Your question really prompted me to think about . . . “

Explicitly share the purpose behind the questions you ask with students. Let them know when you are modeling questioning by stating “this is the type of question you can ask yourself while reading (thinking, listening, viewing).

Incorporate “table top twitter” after presenting information. Have students form small groups and give each group a large piece of paper with an idea that was presented written in the middle of the paper. Give each student a different color of marker. Ask students to respond, without talking, to the idea by either posing written questions or comments.

Create a question wall or chart to keep a record of thought provoking questions posed by students.

Map questions during classroom discussions to see how many questions were asked and if, most importantly, students asked each other questions.

Assign questions for homework. Ask students to bring in questions related to the current topic.

Incorporate TAG into your students’ time for sharing their writing. After a student shares, ask a student to **Tell** them what they heard, ask the next student to **Ask** them a question, and the last student to **Give** them a compliment or suggestion.

Give students time to research answers to their questions and opportunities to share what they learned.

Puig, E. (2013). Text dependent questioning: Stop the insanity! *Florida English Journal: Literature in the 21st Century Classroom*, (2013), 1–15.

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*"Who are you, question mark?
I often ask myself questions.
In your festive garb
You look like a judge
You are the happiest of punctuation marks
At least you get answers."*

– Patricia Duncker. *Hallucinating Foucault*

Place a question on the promethean board and give directions to responding by phone.

Place something on a table – what questions do you have?

Place captivating pictures on the wall

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