

Activity: Which questioning techniques?

Objectives

- To identify and explore a range of questioning techniques for individuals and groups.
- To identify appropriate questioning techniques in teaching situations.
- To evaluate questioning techniques for individuals and groups.

Note.

This activity on questioning techniques is divided into tasks that encourage participants to recognise and evaluate question types and techniques. Participants will have the opportunity to explore different types of question, how they are used and their impact on learners and learning. You may wish to use the activity on open and closed questions before introducing these tasks.

The main objective in this session is to encourage participant to recognise and explore questioning opportunities. Some participants may not ever use questioning as a tool, whilst others may use the tool without much consideration as to its value in helping differentiate learners' needs and develop learning.

Task 1 gives participants an opportunity to investigate the skill base required for different types of question. Participants will need to identify the level of skill the different questions demand of the learner and consider which of the following skills they want the learner to demonstrate: knowledge, understanding/application, analysis and evaluation. This will help participants to become aware of how to differentiate and to target questions more thoughtfully.

The skill levels should be written as headings on sheets of flipchart paper and given to each group.

Task 1: Question types.

Resources

- Powerpoint slides or handouts of the slides.
- Cards or strips with questions
- Flipchart paper
- White or blue tack

Note. There is no answer sheet as this exercise is designed to stimulate thinking, discussion and creativity.

The task.

Provide each group with a set of cards with the questions face up. Ask members of the group to take a card and read it aloud. Through discussion, identify which of the skill level categories shown below the question would be most likely targeted by that kind of question. The skill-level categories are placed as headings on the flip chart paper.

The skill-level categories, are:

- knowledge
- understanding/application
- analysis
- evaluation

When a group has decided on a question's skill-level they should place it in an appropriate column on the flip chart. A question may be suitable for more than one category.

The groups should then feed their findings back to the whole group, justify their decisions and debate them with the whole group. They could also explain:

- why they might target a particular question at a particular learner;
- what skills and knowledge they are checking and developing;
- how they might adjust their approaches to differentiate better.

Cards for task 1.

1 How do you...?	2 What is the meaning of...?	3 Can you tell me this affects the situation
4 What happens next?	5 In your opinion what answer is correct...?	6 How do you explain...?
7 Do you recognise this?	8 Make a comparison. Which is best? Why?	9 How can you explain your decision?
10 What is your decision?	11 Explain the impact of...	12 What conclusions can you draw?
13 Identify the key issues?	14 How does it feel?	15 How did you get to that point?
16 What impact will this have on your decision?	17 What does it mean?	18 What is the impact of...?

Task 2. Which questioning techniques?

Resources.

- Grid 'What are these techniques good for?'
- 'Questioning techniques'-handout.
- Red, amber and green pens.

The task.

- In groups of up to 5 participants select one questioning technique at a time from the list headed 'Questioning techniques'.
- The group discusses how effective the questioning technique is in relation to the criteria set out along the top of the grid. For example, does the questioning technique involve just one learner? If so, then the participation rate will probably be poor.

Criteria.

- teacher or trainer gets feedback- teacher or trainer gets representative feedback on quality of learners' reasoning and understanding;
- learner gets feedback- learners receive feedback on the quality of their understanding, ideally improving it as a result;
- participation rate- high proportion of learners are engaged in trying to answer question;
- thinking time- learners are likely to spend time thinking about the question and the quality of the answer;
- learner comfort- learners are not put on the spot and are unlikely to feel humiliated by the teacher, trainer or other learners;
- teacher and trainer observations- an opportunity for teachers and trainers to think and tailor strategies for individuals or groups.

Ratings:

Green=Good, Amber= OK, Red= Poor.

Task 3. Which questioning techniques to use when.

For each of the questioning techniques, participants should decide in their groups how, when and where they are best used. The information goes on the blank space on the grid under the heading 'When?'. Some ideas to support the decisions can be found below. This list can be added to.

- Introducing a topic for the first time to a group.
- Imparting theory/information.
- Developing understanding.
- Provoking thought and the development of ideas.
- Encouraging analysis and evaluation.
- Revising a topic area.
- Sharing ideas.

What are these techniques good for?

Questioning techniques	Teacher or trainer gets feedback	Learners get feedback	Learner participation rate	Learner thinking time	Learner comfort	Teacher or trainer observations	When to use techniques
Question and answer: Volunteers answer. Teacher or trainer asks a question. Learners volunteer to answer.							
Question and answer: Nominates answer. Teacher or trainer asks a question and nominates person to answer.							
Buzz Groups: Volunteers answer. Learners work in small groups to answer a thought-provoking question. Teacher or trainer asks each group in turn to contribute to part of the answer. A volunteer answers for their group.							
Buzz Groups: Nominates answer. As above, but the teacher or trainer nominates the learner in each group who will contribute that group's answer(s) after the discussion.							
Assertive Questioning - Groups work on thought-provoking questions. Teacher or trainer asks individuals to give their group's answer. As a whole class they then discuss the groups' different answers and agree a 'class answer'. Only then does the teacher or trainer 'give away' the correct answer.							
Pair Checking - Teacher or trainer asks a question, then learners work alone to answer it. In pairs learners then compare answers, giving their partner one good point and one way their answer could be improved while the teacher or trainer observes. The teacher or trainer then gives the correct answer.							
Giving Answer - Teacher or trainer gives several answers, some correct some not. Learners work as groups to identify the correct answer. Teacher or trainer asks individuals to justify their chosen answer. This can be linked with assertive questioning and pair checking.							

Answer sheet

Some suggested answers are given below. In many cases there is no definitive answer as the effectiveness of the strategy will depend on a number of factors. Some examples are given of factors on which the answer might depend on how a strategy might be adapted.

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Assertive questioning: Groups work on thought-provoking questions. Teacher or trainer asks individuals to give their group's answer. As a whole class they then discuss the groups' different answers and agree a 'class answer'. Only then does the teacher or trainer reveal the correct answer.

Pair checking: Teacher or trainer asks a question, then learners work alone to answer it. In pairs learners then compare answers, giving their partner one good point and one way their answer could be improved while the teacher or trainer observes and listens carefully.

Giving answer: Teacher or trainer gives several answers, some correct and some not correct. Learners work in groups to identify the correct answer. Teacher or trainer asks individuals to justify their chosen answer. Teacher or trainer asks individuals to justify their chosen answer. This can be linked with assertive questioning and pair checking.

Using mini-whiteboards. The teacher or trainers asks a group a question and asks them to write their answers on the mini-whiteboard. The whole group is then asked to hold up their answers and the teacher checks the answers.

Task 4.

Applying questioning techniques.

Once participants feel confident that they have a better understanding of questioning techniques, they may wish to ask a colleague or their mentor to observe them using questioning techniques.

Alternatively they may wish to observe an experienced teacher using questioning techniques. The video footage '**Diane's session**' shows an experienced teacher using a range of questioning techniques.

The following grid could be used to record observations and the information collected could act as a focus for discussion.

Participants could also use the grid to observe some of the questioning techniques on the video footage.

OBSERVER GRID

Range of techniques employed
Which received the best response from the learners?
How responsive or able to adapt was the teacher or trainer?
Note examples of particularly effective practice by the teacher or trainer.
To what extent did the teacher or trainer check and develop the understanding and learning of all learners?