

Workshop 02: Speaker Notes: EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Slide 2:

These are the learning intentions for this workshop.

Slide 3:

As teachers we ask many questions, but what exactly is meant by 'effective questioning'? Effective questioning is the framing, delivering, timing, soliciting and responding to questions in order to provide information about student knowledge, understanding and skills that informs the teacher's planning and selection of teaching strategies to move students from where they are to where they need to go.

Slide 4:

It's not, necessarily, about asking more questions. In fact, research shows that teachers ask a lot of questions in the course of a day ... approximately one every 72 seconds, and on average, 38% of these are actually answered by the teacher him/herself!

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Given these figures

- How well do the questions we currently pose help us to:
 - identify where students are currently in their learning
 - expand and deepen the learning
 - inform planning for future learning
- Is there anything you could do better or differently to meet these three goals?

Undoubtedly even the best of us could improve the quality of the questions we ask as well as the way we respond to the questions and answers we receive from our students.

And there are some very simple strategies to help us do this which we will be discussing in this workshop.

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Approaches that help to create the right climate, can promote effective questioning. In turn, effective questioning can reinforce and help to develop a positive classroom culture.

We can establish a positive climate in our classrooms by:

- Promoting a risk-taking culture. In order for students to take risks, they need to know that all contributions are encouraged and valued and that making errors is part of the learning experience. Is it OK to give a 'wrong' answer? Is everybody's opinion valued in your classroom? By you? By the other students?

- Creating a community of inquiry and of independent thinking and learning will also help foster a positive climate . Supportive relationships (teacher-student and student-student) are extremely important. These can help create an environment where you are part of the learning community.
- Finally, a commitment to learning for all students should be in evidence. The shared belief that all children have the capacity to learn has to be clear and reinforced in the classroom. This can be done by emphasising progression in learning rather than performance This can help promote self-belief and personal satisfaction on completion of tasks, because students can feel secure in coming up with their own ideas, thinking out loud and explaining their reasoning.

Keeping these things in mind, and using some of these approaches to create the right climate, can promote effective questioning . In turn, effective questioning can reinforce and help to develop and perpetuate a positive classroom culture.

Slide 7:

The first thing we can do is to ask better questions by planning questions more carefully and taking more care when framing our questions. To do this, we consider

- What do I want my students to learn?
- How will they learn it?
- How will I find out if they have learnt it?

Our questions should have the effect of reinforcing the focus of learning and draw out students' understanding of the learning .

- To start, we can ask fewer questions . Many of the questions we ask students are not meant to be answered; they are really instructions ('Would everyone line up, please?'), rhetorical questions ('Do you think I didn't see that?'), or answered by the teacher .
- We can also use more 'open' questions . Different types of questions serve different purposes. Where recall is required and you want to find out what your students know, closed questions are appropriate. However, when you want to know what they understand, use more open-ended questions e.g. rather than ask 'What is the colour change observed when red litmus paper is dipped in vinegar?', ask 'How can you test to check if vinegar is an acid or a base?').
- Sequencing your questions is also useful. By carefully planning the sequence of questions, you can expand the learning, encourage students to the desired

outcome/answer and help them on their learning journey. For example, your questions could move from narrow to broad (specific to general) or from broad to narrow (general to specific).

- And finally, we can prepare 'key questions. Preparing 2-3 'key questions' before a lesson or activity can help to introduce the lesson and its learning intentions, structure the lesson, make links within the lesson and keep everyone on task. They can be displayed on prompt cards or in the form of a mind map.

Slide 8:

We can also be more effective in our questioning by asking questions in a better, more effective way. This clearly includes thinking about the way we ask questions but it also involves thinking about how we allow students to respond. Some strategies to consider are on this slide.

- Involve the whole class. If we want to promote a risk-taking culture, we need to ensure that students do not feel threatened. One strategy is to address the group rather than an individual.
- Another strategy is to 'think, pair, share.' Students are sometimes intimidated by having to speak up in a whole-class situation. You can use this strategy to involve everyone. Here, students think about their answer, discuss it with a partner and then with a group. This can take the focus off the individual, improve self-esteem and give shy students a voice.
- Providing students with time to think is also critical to effective questioning. Research shows that teachers typically allow less than one second of wait time between posing the question and asking for the answer (sometimes by providing the answer themselves). By increasing that wait time to 3-5 seconds, you can make a significant difference to your question's effectiveness. Doing so
 - gives students the vital time they need to order their thoughts
 - ensures more students are likely to offer an answer
 - results in fewer 'I don't know' responses
 - produces more thoughtful, creative and extended answers
 - benefits all children, regardless of their ability.

However, make sure students know and understand that there is time to think so that they do not feel pressured to answer straight away.

- You finally, consider a 'no hands up' approach. When you ask a question and one student in a class puts his or her hand up, often everyone else in the class stops thinking or trying to work out the answer. By asking for 'no hands up', you can encourage all students to stay engaged with the question for longer.

Slide 9:

Effective questioning also involves dealing with responses from students in an effective and encouraging way. Here are some strategies that contribute to achieving this

- First, you can use wrong answers to develop understanding. Part of our role here is to *listen* to the students' responses. We need to listen for the answers we seek but at the same time not overlook other answers and responses that may reveal more about the student's perception of the question and their level of, and route to, understanding. We can actually put 'wrong' answers to use by turning them into a springboard for improved understanding. The trick is to point out the error in such a way that you don't actually say '*No that's wrong*' and at the same time steer the student towards a better response.
- Also, prompt students to rethink and review what has already been discussed and/or give cues to guide them and 'nudge' them in the right direction. For example, ask them, 'Why do you think that...?', 'Could you explain...?' or 'What about...?'. Remember, prompts do not always have to be verbal. A nod, smile or encouraging hand gesture can also be used to prompt students' answers.
- And finally, always listen and respond positively to students who are genuinely contributing to the discussion. This can encourage them to take risks and volunteer answers rather than being silent because they are afraid to give the 'wrong answer'.

Slide 10:

As teachers, we ask the majority of questions in the classroom (somewhere in the region of 50-70% more than the students). Encouraging students to ask questions is a key part of learning. Encouraging students to ask questions promotes student involvement, develops independence, helps students to work through difficulties (rather than automatically asking for help), develops the ability to explain things more easily and develops reflection and evaluation of their own learning.

We can encourage students' questions by

- Modelling the process. For example, think aloud and frame questions. This allows

students to develop the appropriate vocabulary for questioning and to understand the difference between a good and bad question.

- We also need to provide our students with opportunities to practise their skills . For example, by providing an appropriate object or stimulus, we can stimulate students' curiosity and encourage them to ask questions. Alternatively, students can create questions about part of a text (or a topic) as a means of finding a way into it . Students who come up with their own questions are much more likely to remember the answer.
- Finally, building time into our lessons for students to ask questions is a good idea. Our students will be more inclined to ask questions if there is a supportive atmosphere in the classroom.

Slide 11:

Here are some questions that you might take a few minutes to discuss.

Note to facilitator:

- The outcomes of the discussion can be used when deciding how to use the *Effective Questioning Booklet 2*.

Slide 12:

To recap, here are a few key messages to take away with you.

- ***You are now ready to move onto the materials in the Effective Questioning workshop Booklet 2.***