Ask Better Questions

The art of asking questions is more complex than we might assume. Teachers ask hundreds of questions every day as they try to unravel what pupils are thinking. If we are to maximise the benefit of using questions to gather feedback, we should aim to ask a range of question types, from information recall to promote retrieval practice to higher-order questions which encourage the development of answers.

1. BE CLEAR

Ask questions which are clear and concise to reduce ambiguity and to ensure that pupils understand what type of response you are looking for. Repeat your question to provide clarity and give wait time.

2. PLAN AHEAD

When developing your scheme of work and planning a series of lessons, allocate time to discuss common misconceptions with colleagues. This will allow you to formulate questions to help dispel misconceptions pupils may have about your subject.

3. GIVE TIME

Give pupils time to process the question you have asked them and to think about their response. This will boost their confidence in sharing ideas without feeling that they are being put on the spot. Research suggests 3-5 seconds of wait time.

4. BUILD ENGAGEMENT

Take the time to build a classroom culture where pupils feel confident in sharing responses. You can do this by establishing expectations, and creating an environment where pupils feel that they can contribute without fear of retribution from their peers.

5. PROMOTE EXTENSION

Pupils will want to find the shortcut that allows them to provide the shortest response. Instead, encourage pupils to extend on their initial response by asking them a follow-up question, "Can you give me an example...?"

6. MOVE FROM LOW TO HIGH

Use lower cognitive questions to establish foundation knowledge recall, and then build on this by subsequently asking higher-order questions to deepen understanding.

7. USE LOW-STAKE RECALL

Use questioning to gather information quickly about what pupils have understood. This can be achieved through closed questions that allow you, as the teacher, to uncover any misconceptions and gaps in knowledge of the subjects you need to re-teach.

8. ENCOURAGE THEIR QUESTIONS

Build in time for pupils to ask their own questions, either to you, as the teacher, or to their peers. This will support their own development towards mastery in your subject.

9. COLD CALL

Encourage pupils to share their ideas with the rest of the class by directing questions to specific pupils. For example, "What is the process of erosion, Tom?".

10. PRACTISE QUESTIONS

Make time to practise drafting and asking questions with colleagues. This can support the development of the clear and concise questions that you then ask pupils and reduce the potential for misunderstanding.



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