

Questioning Strategies

Questioning, as a form of teaching strategy, has been around since before Aristotle. Why has it been around so long? Because it works. Let's qualify that: *it works when done correctly.*

Students that are required to learn difficult subjects in too short a time or in classes where teaching concepts takes second place to the teaching of vocabulary or facts, may be at-risk for failure (Nelson, 2001). How do we plan instruction and develop content while incorporating research that supports the belief that the most effective teaching is highly content specific (National Research Council, 2000)? Too many schools still continue to cover the content in books and students continue to memorize...these methods are ineffective and inefficient and colleges are paying the price in reteaching basic skills to entry level college students (Nelson, 2001).

Did you know?

Teachers spend, on average, 40 to 50 percent of classroom instruction time on questioning (asking and answering). Most questions, however, are either asked too quickly, or not developed to foster critical or quality thinking about their topic.

Have you ever been in a class or situation where someone asked a question and didn't wait for you to respond? This DOES NOT lead to critical thinking and it often leads to students being discouraged from asking ANY questions.

Cotton, 2000; Doyle, 1986; Dillon, 1988

So where do you start?

Developing questions as part of your teaching strategy will involve knowing your subject very well and planning for student direction. If you know your subject well,

then you can begin to think about the types of questions that a new learner would have. Researchers have identified several types of questioning strategies: convergent, divergent, and evaluative.

Divergent questioning is aimed at developing a broad range of student responses. This type of question would be very good for introducing a topic. Students should feel free to express themselves without your criticism. Your goal with divergent questioning is to develop and encourage responses.

Convergent questioning develops around one single objective. These are generally short answer, yes or no, or lower-level questions.

Evaluative questioning typically asks the student to measure what they are saying based on some criteria or their own beliefs and judgments. Review the examples of each type of question.

Divergent, Convergent, and Evaluative Examples

Divergent:

The Cosmetology teacher asks her students; “ What would happen if there were no safety standards or rules in Beauty Shops?”

Convergent:

The Cosmetology teacher asks her students; “ Do you feel that safety is important in Cosmetology?”

Evaluative:

The Cosmetology teacher asks her students; “ What happens if a shop were closed for safety reasons?”, or “Do you feel that you would want to go into a shop that has had safety violations and if not, why?”

Wait to hear the response and see if it is correct. If any of the steps are incorrect or it appears the student does not understand, ask them to clarify. If they do not appear to understand, ask another student. If it appears that several students do not understand, reteach the content. When questioning students try to make them feel comfortable in answering your questions. Some students may be extremely stressed when answering in front of a group. Take this into consideration.

Think about it:

A new welding teacher is very knowledgeable on Tig welding. The students in his class have no idea what Tig is. The new teacher can brainstorm possible questions these students may have on Tig. The teacher could explain Tig to a colleague. They should then pay attention to what questions are asked by the colleague for comprehension.

Questioning should also be developed that will assess what level the students are at in the acquisition of Tig welding knowledge. Questions such as “do you understand” are fine, but the teacher does not really know the level of understanding. Questions such as “*explain to me the steps involved in Tig welding*” would yield answers that are more specific.

If you are new to teaching, you may want to practice how long you wait for an answer to your question. When someone responds to your question, think carefully about their response and if it can be developed further, ask them about it. This not only develops the line of questioning, but it shows the student that you really care about what they have to say and feel it is important to the discussion. Try to acknowledge all responses. By showing interest in what the student has to say, you are giving validity to them and acknowledging their participation in class.

Effective Questioning Strategies:

- 1. Give students questions that start them thinking about new material that needs to be covered. Consider asking a question about a similar item already taught that can lead-in to learning the new material. Ask them what they know about the subject.**
- 2. Allow time for students to answer. At least 3 seconds for lower-cognitive questions (yes, no, one word answers) and more for higher-level questions. Give opportunities to students who are fast learners and those that are slow learners. Give each time to answer questions.**
- 3. To reinforce students, at the beginning ask more lower-level questions students will answer correctly. As students become more comfortable in your class and with the subject, ask higher-level questions.**
- 4. Mix lower-level questions (memory) with higher-level, open-ended questions to stimulate student learning.**
- 5. Use redirection and reinforcement for all students, when needed, but especially for those who have initial inaccurate or incomplete answers.**

Cotton, 2000

Use the responses to questions as a form of information assessment. This can guide you in determining the level of student acquisition of learning and possible areas for reteaching.

