QUESTIONING: THE DISCIPLINE OF TRAINING INQUISITIVE MINDS

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“The important thing is to never stop questioning.” – Albert Einstein

In the age where information has been made readily available by fast-paced technological advancement, which means to say that there’s plenty to discover or ask about, it is ironic that despite children being naturally curious, classrooms are oftentimes filled with deafening silence during class discussion. In as much as a teacher would want to elicit responses from students when a question is being asked, nowadays, it is becoming more and more challenging to get answers from them. Blank faces, bowed heads, and eyes refusing contact with the teacher are the most common reactions observed. It is quite bothersome to guess the sorts of mental processes in every student’s mind; that is why, to make their thoughts visible to the teacher, it is necessary to pose questions.

Questioning is a significant approach to arouse learners’ curiosity or to resolve a lesson problem in class. Asking questions is also a formative way of assessing students’ present knowledge of the lesson as well as learning gaps. Questions also help teachers formulate means to help students bridge these gaps between their prior knowledge and the learning targets. However, with the challenge of generating answers from the students that teachers face today, sadly, this often leads to the teacher doubting either his capability to teach or his students’ ability to learn; worst both. Moreover, in a learner-centered classroom, students are not only expected to answer questions, instead, they are anticipated to be the ones throwing and formulating thought-provoking inquiries.
In this regard, questions are undoubtedly fundamental in learning and teachers must highlight an inquiry-based classroom setting. According to an article written by Gary Hall, a teacher in Beverley, England, research has identified that allowing students to produce stimulating questions and letting them answer these promote an effective study system. One great way to train students to have the habit of asking intelligent questions is for the teacher to be exemplary in the field of questioning.

It is vital to keep in mind that questions have to inspire students to be critical, enabling learners to answer these inquiries in countless standpoint and at the same time probe for more information while considering different contexts. Socrates, a Greek philosopher and teacher also believed that well-thought questioning is a discipline that students must exercise in order to create and observe reasonable ideas and identify the rationality of these concepts.

In order to achieve a class that is highly responsive to questions and to help students develop strategies in questioning, here are some reminders to consider:

1. Use low-level and high-level questions.

In Bloom’s Taxonomy, lower level questions are the ones tapping the knowledge, understanding, and plain application processes of the cognitive domain. These questions pay attention to simple recollection of facts and information. On the other hand, higher-level queries focus on the students’ capability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas. These questions go beyond identifying learners’ basic knowledge or their strong or weak points. Instead, these motivate students to think profoundly and analytically.

Ideally, teachers must use different level of questions to effectively control the flow of the discussion and to lead students toward the target learning objectives.

2. Ask convergent or divergent questions.
Aside from using different levels of questions, a teacher must also think through the kind of questions he is asking.

Convergent questions are also known as closed-ended questions. These often lead to a single precise answer, if not, to a restricted amount of suitable responses – of which mostly are already expected to be provided to the teacher. Although at times, convergent questions are certainly important, to stimulate in-depth mental activities, the teacher must ask open-ended questions as regularly as possible.

On the other hand, divergent questions are often related to higher order thinking practices as they let students’ thoughts wander in order arrive at creative and logical answers. These answers frequently lead to a wide range of possible suitability; hence providing more opportunities for students to discuss answers among themselves and to examine the validity of differing viewpoints, which may eventually result to independent thinking and metacognition. However, it is necessary to point out that despite generating subjective answers, teachers must set standards to increase objectivity and to measure acceptability.

3. Recognize and appreciate varying responses from students.

Developing the mental abilities of students is as equally important as building their self-esteem. Teachers must learn how to manage erroneous answers and even the ones just as close to hitting the right response. Students learn more in a classroom environment where they are free to explore and are allowed to take risks, commit and correct mistakes without being judged.

4. Give learners enough time to respond and motivate them to expound their answers.

Giving students thinking time before and after asking them a question gives them the opportunity to process details. Pausing and motivating students to explicate the answers enable the teachers to check understanding and also comprehension challenges
so that the teacher can address them effectively. When students share responses aloud, teachers can somehow see students’ manner of thinking as well as how they organize thoughts to arrive at their answers. If students are struggling in answering, the teacher may try rephrasing the question or providing additional questions to keep the discussion going while guiding the learners.

5. Write their answers.

When teachers write and record student’s responses, it may give them the feeling that their thoughts are important and that the instructors give value to their thinking. By doing this, learners will be motivated to continue expressing and sharing or even reflecting on the own answers, which may eventually help them pursue knowledge independently.

Inside the teaching space, students’ capability to articulate their thoughts and ideas can be generated through questioning; hence, teachers must always be ready to challenge the students in order to achieve profound level of learning and an unconventional, inquisitive mind. With this we can say that questioning is not only an art, but is also a discipline that both students and teachers should master.
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