Why are Questions important?

By: Mrs. Amelinda A. Fandialan
School Principal I

Questions play an important role in the process of teaching and learning because children’s achievement, and their level of engagement, depend on the types of questions teachers formulate and use in a classroom (Kerry, 2002). Recent models of teaching and learning view learning as a social learning is seen as a situated social practice where children are developing identities as a member of a particular community and it is seen as a socially negotiated and arbitrated process (Lave, 1995). This view of teachers and children acknowledge questions as a core function for both learning and teaching. As Hunkin (1995, as cited in Wigging & McTighe, 2001) notes, “We are shifting from viewing questions as devices by which one evaluates specifics of learning to conceptualizing questions as a means of actively processing, thinking about and using information productively.

Research in New Zealand has also documented the correlation between the effective questioning practices of teachers and student achievement. For example, in the Ministry of Education’s Best Evidence Synthesis series, AltonLee (2003) outlines in her report that 59% of variances in students’ achievement are attributed to differences between teachers and classes. Hattie (2002) confirmed these findings and they state that teachers are the most important factor of school-related influences on students’ learning and achievement. Vygotsky’s (1978 as cited in Berk, 2004) sociocultural theory proposes that talk is not about the transmission of facts but is rather the cultural/socialization interactions between a child and a more competent adult. This requires teachers to co-construct learning with the children. The teacher’s role in this context is to build on what children already know and extend that by asking high-level questions. It is through these scaffolded interactions that the child learns and develops higher cognitive processing skills (Cazden, 2001; Kerry, 2002).

It is imperative therefore that teachers are knowledgeable in rising questions. They must be equipped with essential knowledge and skills to conduct effective questioning episode which facilitate higher-order thinking. Hence, the knowledge and skills used in asking different types of questions in a classroom is one important aspect of the teaching and learning process.

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