

CHAPTER FIVE

QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Good teachers use a variety of questioning techniques to engage their students and improve student learning. Questioning students is one of the most important teaching methods in a teacher's toolbox. The challenge is to find ways to encourage all students to answer the question either in their heads or with others in the classroom. The traditional and widely used method of asking a question and picking a student with his or her hand in the air is useful, but it should be combined with other techniques to maximize student learning for all students, even those who do not get picked or who do not raise their hands. This chapter includes 13 questioning strategies that effective teachers use to engage students. We encourage you to use at least two different kinds of questioning techniques in every lesson and to try out a new technique at least once in each topic in the syllabus.

****Technique #21 No Hands**

No Hands refers to picking students who do not raise their hand. Effective teachers use this strategy regularly, either announced or unannounced to the class. This ensures that every student knows that he or she could be picked to answer a question at any time. They can't avoid disengaging from the lesson by not raising their hand. When used regularly, this strategy is highly effective for improving student engagement and listening.

****Technique #22 Call and Response**

Call and response is a method that teachers have used for generations. The teacher asks a question and the whole class responds at once. Sometimes the teacher will give a clue to the class by asking a question and then saying "Class!" to elicit the whole class response. This strategy encourages and gives opportunities for the entire class to respond to questions.

****Technique #23 Ask Again**

This is used when a student gives an incorrect answer or replies with "I don't know." The teacher responds by saying, "I will come back to you again for the answer, so listen to the responses of your peers." Once another student gets the answer, the teacher goes back to the original student and asks him or her for the answer. This strategy encourages good listening and sends a message to students that they can and will learn the material.

****Technique #24 Simplify the Question**

This strategy can be used when a student is unable to answer a question. The teacher prompts the student with an easier question or questions that will help lead the student to answer the original question. Prompting helps students to answer questions successfully, helps build confidence and improves understanding. Additionally, other students who might not know the answer can also learn in the process. For example: the teacher asks, *Is the word **house** a noun?* The student says *I don't know*. The teacher could then ask *What is the definition of a noun?* The student replies *a person, place or thing*. The teacher asks *Is a house a person, place or thing?* The student responds *It is a thing*. The teacher then asks the original question. *So, is the word **house** a noun?* The student answers *Yes*.

****Technique#25 Tell Me More**

Tell Me More encourages students to broaden or deepen their thinking about a topic or question. It is used when a student answers a question correctly. The teacher then asks the student to *tell me more* about the topic or asks the student a follow-up question that encourages higher order thinking skills – like comparing and contrasting, evaluating, combining ideas, and summarizing. An example of this is might be in a biology class focused on the causes of water pollution, where a student mentions fertilizers used by farmers that are washed into rivers when it rains. The teacher could ask the student to evaluate alternatives to fertilizer or to combine ideas about water pollution in this unit with ideas about the use of non-harmful organic fertilizers discussed in a previous unit.

****Technique #26 Agree or Disagree**

This technique starts with the teacher asking a question. A student answers. Then the teacher prompts the class to agree or disagree. The teacher might say to the class, “If you agree, snap your fingers two times,” or “give a thumbs up or raise your hand.” Agree or Disagree is used to encourage all students to evaluate an answer and for teachers to gauge understanding. It is most effective when teachers select students to defend their positions. This helps to ensure that students don't just put their thumbs up or down like everyone else.

****Technique #27 Question of the Day**

The Question of the Day is a question posted on the board each day that is aligned with the learning goal for the lesson. It is a question the teacher wants his or her students to answer correctly by the end of the lesson. The teacher focuses student attention on this question at the beginning of a lesson and closes the lesson by having students answer it. Here are examples for different subject areas: Biology: How does

poaching affect the ecosystem of the Serengeti? Physics: What is the difference between weigh and mass?
Civics: What is a Parliamentary system of government?

****Technique #28 Equitable Questioning**

Equitable questioning means making sure that boys and girls, 'quick' and 'slow' learners, and students from different ethnic groups, religions, and backgrounds get to answer questions. Teachers should be aware of how they spread their questions out when selecting students to answer. They should make sure that all students are called on to answer questions. Teachers should reflect during and after a lesson whether or not they spread questions equitably around the room. Teachers should reflect on whether or not they are favoring some students over others when questioning. It is helpful to have colleagues watch and observe one another to help focus attention on equitable questioning.

****Technique #29 Higher Order Thinking Questions**

Teachers can engage students with different levels of thinking by asking the right kind of questions. Bloom's Taxonomy recognizes six levels of thinking. What follows are definitions of the levels and words to use when questioning students. **Remembering** (level 1): Students find or remember information. Teachers can use these words in their questions: *list, name, identify, locate, describe, memorize, define, or find ideas*. **Understanding** (level 2): Students understand and make sense out of information. Teachers should use these words in their questions: *explain, summarize, discuss, or paraphrase*. **Applying** (level 3): Students use information in new or similar situations. Teachers might use these words when asking questions: *apply, solve a problem, make a chart or diagram, draw or use information*. **Analyzing** (level 4): Students take information apart and explore relationships. Teachers should use these words in their questions: *categorize, examine, compare and contrast, or organize*. **Evaluating** (level 5): Students examine information and make judgements. Teachers can employ these words when formulating questions: *judge, test, critique, defend, or criticize*. **Creating** (level 6): Students use information to create something new. Teachers should use these kinds of words in their questions: *design, build, construct, plan, produce, devise, or invent*.

Technique #30 Quick Questions

This is a fast paced questioning technique where teachers ask questions quickly and students don't raise their hands. When a student answers the question correctly, the teacher moves on to ask another question. If a student answers incorrectly, the teacher immediately goes to another student for the correct answer. This is a good warm up activity or closing activity for a lesson. It is usually a short activity that takes just

a few minutes. It creates a game-like atmosphere in the classroom and encourages active listening. Students can stand up while doing this activity to make it more active and fun.

Technique #31 Wait Time

When asking questions, it often a good idea to give students enough time – typically 5 to 7 seconds - to think about an answer before a teacher provides help. Often teachers feel rushed or move too quickly to another student to break the silence and don't give students enough time to formulate an answer.

Technique #32 Get it Right

This strategy encourages students to answer questions fully and correctly. When a student answers the question partially right, the teacher says, "You are almost there." The teacher then follows up with prompts and more questioning to help the student "get it right." The teacher can also ask other students in the class to help answer the question more fully and correctly. Get It Right sends a strong message to students to think deeply and clearly about a topic. It helps create a learning environment with high expectations and standards of learning.

Technique #33 Review Question

Effective teachers start lessons with review questions to help students connect with previous lessons. These review questions are sometimes written on the board for students to answer when they first enter the room. Review questions are also used when preparing students for tests and examinations. Here are some examples: Science: *What did we learn about water pollution yesterday?* Math: *What did we learn last week about simplifying fractions.* English: *Summarize what your learned on Monday about the past tense.*