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Questions and Questioning in Teaching and Training

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Overview

- Some questions for you
- Purposes of questioning in teaching and training
- Categorising questions
- Questions in the classroom
- Questions in training
- Questions and thinking
- Some reminders about questioning

Some questions for you

1. Who asks most of the questions in your lessons?
2. To how many of your own questions do you already know the answer?
3. How do you "receive" your students' answers?
4. What kinds of questions do your students ask in class?
5. How do you react if you don't know the answer to a question put by a student?

Purposes of teacher/trainer questioning

- To check learning
- To check understanding
- To trigger learning
- To scaffold learning
- To keep discipline
- To introduce a topic
- To trigger reflection

Purposes of learner questioning

- To ask for information
- To satisfy curiosity
- To challenge the teacher
- To distract the teacher
- To ask permission
- To draw attention to her/himself

Categorising questions

- According to purpose
- Open-ended vs closed
- 'Wh-' vs 'yes/no'
- Display vs referential
- According to thinking skills



Robert Frost: The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Thinking Skills

- Lower order (staying within a given frame)
 - Recall of knowledge
 - Comprehension
- Higher order (going beyond a given frame)
 - Wider application of knowledge
 - Analysing
 - Synthesising & evaluating
 - Creating new meanings

Some reminders about questioning

Do.....

- ... ask questions clearly and simply
- ... ask lower order questions to check learning
- ... probe and encourage further thinking
- ... allow your students' answers to lead to more questions
- ...ask your questions openly
- ...allow time for thinking and answering

Don't.....

- ..ask 'multiple' questions
- ... stop at that point!
- ... accept all responses at face value
- ... always insist on closure after a question has been answered
- ...ask 'loaded' questions which may trap or threaten learners
- ...shoot questions like bullets

Some reminders about questioning (continued)

Do.....

- ..allow your students' answers to shape your own thinking
- ...listen to and affirm your students' answers
- ...ask fewer, better questions

- ...encourage your students to be questioners

Don't.....

- ...be afraid of silence

- ...hog the talking time

- ... ask a lot of 'low quality' questions

- ... monopolise the role of questioner

and finally

*"Let us make the study of the art of question-asking one of the central disciplines in language education."
(Postman 1979)*

*"There are more questions than answers,
And the more I find out, the less I know"
(Johnny Nash, reggae song)*

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