



ART OF QUESTIONING AND ANSWERING

INTRODUCTION

A question is any sentence which has an interrogative form or function. In classroom settings, teacher questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content and elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how to do it. The ability to ask question is the foundation to inquiry learning.

Questioning is one of the most important devices of teaching. It plays a very important part in learning, teaching and testing. It is said that the success and efficiency of our teaching depends more on the skill and judgement with which we put questions than on any other single circumstance. It is said that 'the teacher who never questions, never teaches'. In fact the power to question well is one of the fine arts of teaching. According to Raymond, 'The acquisition of a good style of questioning may be laid down as some of the essential ambitions of a young teacher'.

Questioning, in fact is one of the tricks of trade for a teacher. Question is a natural and enjoyable means of intellectual and social growth for the child. It is recognized as one of the most important means of stimulating, thinking and learning process in a child's growing stage. The mind of the learner and the teacher can be brought into close touch and the learners can be taught to be creative through this device. Questioning can be said as 'the key to all creative activity.'

The questioning process is an essential part of instruction in that it allows teachers to monitor student competence and understanding as well as increase through provoking discussion. Through encouraging students to formulate educated responses and express their opinions, teachers are able to assess how familiar or interested they are in the material/content.

SIGNIFICANCE OF QUESTIONING

The art of questioning is the most potent weapon in the educational armory of the teacher. Good questions writes F.Theodore Struck, by their very nature are educative, and they have a very prominent place in all kinds of learning. Questioning plays an indispensable part in learning teaching and testing. If used at the right way, at the proper time, questions lead to new realms of understanding they serve as means of organizing knowledge or correlating the results of educative experiences of trying together units of learning and of integrating

personality. One who questions faultlessly teaches effectively. Salmon holds the view that a bad questioner is a bad teacher.

Questioning is meant to interest, engage and to challenge the pupils and to check on prior knowledge. It helps to stimulate recall and use the existing knowledge and experience in order to create new understanding and meaning. It allows focusing and thinking on key concepts and issues thus expanding pupils' thinking from the concrete and factual to the analytical and evaluative.

PURPOSE OF QUESTIONING IN CLASSROOM TEACHING

The following are the purposes of questioning.

1. To test the previous knowledge of the students.
2. To enable them to recall something.
3. To enable them to recognize something.
4. To enable them to think over something.
5. To elicit something from the students.
6. To keep children mentally alert.
7. To promote initiative and originality.
8. To stimulate the curiosity of the students.
9. To ascertain whether the students are following the lessons or not.
10. To link new knowledge with the old.
11. To diagnose the weak points of the students
12. To stimulate interest and effort on the part of the students.
13. To revise the work covered earlier.
14. To develop appreciation and ideals.
15. To create and develop and maintain a good emotional and intellectual atmosphere in the classroom.

CLASSIFICATION OF QUESTIONS

Questions may be classified in a number of ways according to the purpose they serve, the stage of the lesson they are put and according to the particular form or structure. However a general and broad classification may be as follows:

1. **Natural questions-** When the questioner wants to elicit some information and for that purpose makes a query.
2. **Formal questions-** When the questioner already knows about the information asked for. These are put to pupils mostly in the classroom.

Formal questions are further classified into two groups:

i) Testing questions

ii) Teaching or developing questions: These questions are asked during the course of the lesson and help the teacher to elicit information and impart new knowledge. It helps to formulate new generalizations in an inductive way and to focus attention on important points.

Testing questions are further sub divided as:

i) Preliminary or Introductory questions: These are asked at the beginning of a lesson. This is to test the previous knowledge of the students and to link the new knowledge with the already learnt knowledge. It is mainly to motivate the child and arouse his curiosity.

ii) Recapitulatory Questions: These are asked at the end of each section of a lesson as well as at the end of the chapter. These are to ensure that the knowledge has been properly learnt and grasped. These questions deepen the impression already made.

TECHNIQUES OF QUESTIONING

Questioning skills are not just about being aware of the different kinds of questions that are possible to ask. The real skill in questioning is knowing 'how to use' the different kinds of questions. So how to ask questions effectively is the main key to good questioning. Anyone can ask questions but to ask them purposefully and effectively requires understanding, insight and experience. Some of the techniques can be followed.

1. **Question should be stated clearly, definitely and concisely:** Give a pause after posing the question before naming the child who shall answer it. This helps to ensure that the whole class will give attention and thought to it. If the name is announced then the rest of the class will have no inclination to listen.
2. **Encourage development of thought:** The teacher can do it by paying close attention to the pupil while he is speaking. It has good psychological effect upon the pupil and it also sets good example to the rest of the class. In order to stimulate thinking it is very essential that the teacher gives response to the child.
3. **Allow sufficient time for replies:** Time should be given for replies by the student adequately according to the kind of questions asked. This will enable the child to give adequate thought to gather the right and appropriate answer.
4. **Proper discipline must be maintained:** Students should not be allowed to answer without permission, sometimes enthusiasm to answer questions results in chaos in the classroom and spoil the whole purpose of questioning.
5. **Judicious blending of talking and questioning:** Questioning is not a one-way traffic. There is ample scope for the teacher as well as the students to put questions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD QUESTIONING

Some of the characteristics of good questioning are as follows:

1. The language of the question should be simple.

2. Questions should not be ambiguous, lengthy and vague. They should be clear, brief and to the point.
3. They should be suited to the ability of the children to whom the questions are put.
4. Questions should be relevant to the topic.
5. Questions should be graded. They should neither be too easy nor too difficult. If the problem is too easy, the child will not take any interest in it and if it's too difficult he will get discouraged.
6. Questions once asked should not be repeated unless the teacher is sure the class has not followed it.
7. The teacher should try to vary the form of his questions.
8. Two questions should not be asked in one.
9. Questions should be made interesting as far as possible.
10. Questions should be framed in such a way that they do not encourage guess work.
11. Questions should be addressed to the entire class.
12. Questions should be asked in a pleasing manner.
13. Adequate time should be given to answer.
14. The students should be encouraged to ask questions.
15. Questions should be put in such a way that every student thinks he will ask to answer whether he is good or weak.

IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONING

Questioning is a critical skill for teachers because it is the most common form of interaction between teacher and pupil. It is an element of virtually every type and model of lesson. It is a key method of providing appropriate challenge for all pupils. One can also say that it is an important influence on the extent of progress made and the most immediate and accessible way for a teacher to assess learning.

But it is imperative to include a variety of questions to ensure that each student's learning style is addressed rather than only implementing one technique continuously. The teacher should encourage students to share their opinion freely through the use of divergent questions. This gives students a sense of importance and confidence which will lead to increased participation in the future. Feedback after the response from the students is a very essential part of questioning. Proper feedback will lead to valuable discussion. Developing and executing appropriate questioning technique in a classroom is the most valuable way to guarantee strong student participation and increase the ability to which students learn.

The questioning process is an essential part of instruction in that it allows teachers to monitor student competence and understanding as well as increase thought-provoking discussion. It is important to present students with questions that encourage reasoning and that allow them to draw from their prior knowledge rather than accepting "yes or no" responses. Through encouraging students to formulate educated responses and express their opinions, teachers are able to assess how familiar or interested they are in the material.

PITFALLS OF QUESTIONING

Some pitfalls of questioning can be discussed as follows. It is easy to fall into the trap of :

1. Asking too many closed questions.
2. Asking pupils questions to which they can respond with a simple yes and no answer.
3. Asking too many short answer, recall-based questions.
4. Asking bogus 'guess what I am thinking' questions.
5. Starting all questions with the same stem.
6. Dealing ineffectively with incorrect answers or misconceptions.
7. Focusing on small number of pupils and not involving the whole class.
8. Not giving pupils time to reflect or pose their own questions.
9. Asking questions when another strategy might be appropriate.

BLOOM TAXONOMY

“Good learning starts with good questions”, said Prof. Guy Claxton, University of Bristol. Questioning enables teachers to check learners’ understanding. It also benefits learners as it encourages engagement and focuses their thinking on key concepts and ideas. These questioning needs to inspire gifted and talented learners to embrace cognitive thought at a higher-level and is easier to achieve when using open questions. These questions are often arranged according to their level of complexity. This is called taxonomy. Bloom’s Taxonomy is one approach that can be used to help plan and formulate higher order questions. This type of questioning also actively encourages the development of thinking and dialogue skills. In describing these six different levels of comprehension, also called the cognitive domain, Bloom stated that the first three were representative of low-order thinking, or content, whereas the last three were representative of high-level thinking, or process. Effective teachers appeal to each level of thinking to encourage students to draw conclusions, relationships, and applications of information they receive during class. According to Bloom’s taxonomy, we have the following order:

Knowledge: Knowledge – Describe, Identify who, When, Where

Comprehension: Comprehension – Translate, Predict, Why

Application: Application - Demonstrate how , Solve, Try it in a new context

Analysis: Analysis – Explain, Infer, Analyze

Synthesis : Synthesis – Design, Create, Compose

Evaluation : Evaluation - Assess compare/Contrast judge

Apart from this classification we also have lower cognitive questions. Lower cognitive questions are those which ask the student merely to recall verbatim or in his/her own words material previously read or taught by the teacher. They are also referred to in the literature as fact, closed, direct, recall, and knowledge questions.

Higher cognitive questions are defined as those which ask the student to mentally manipulate bits

Of information previously learned to create an answer or to support an answer with logically reasoned evidence. Higher cognitive questions are also called open-ended, interpretive, evaluative, inquiry, inferential, and synthesis questions.

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Effective questioning reinforces and revisits the learning objectives. It includes ‘staging’ questions to draw pupils towards key understanding or to increase the level of challenge in a lesson as it proceeds. It involves all pupils and engages them in thinking for themselves. It promotes justification and reasoning. It also creates an atmosphere of trust where pupils’ opinion and ideas are valued. It shows connections between previous and new learning thus encouraging pupils to speculate and hypothesize. It also encourages pupils to ask as well as to receive questions and at the same time encouraging them to listen and respond to each other as well as to the teacher. When designed and delivered properly, questions are a powerful tool. Formulating an effective question does not only mean creating a query that elicits a “correct answer” but rather creates a learning experience that invites authentic reflection and discussion. Students need to become critical thinkers, discover their voice, and be acknowledged for having a point of view that matters. Hence, designing questions that elicit higher-level thinking such as application, analysis, evaluation and creation, takes time and effort.

Effective questions are:

- **purposeful**– asked to achieve a specific purpose
 - **clear**– students understand what they mean
 - **brief**– stated in as few words as possible
 - **natural** – stated simply, in conversational English
 - **thought-provoking**– they stimulate thought and response
 - **limited in scope**– only one or two points in chain of reasoning called for
 - **adapted to the level of the class**– tailored to the kinds of students in the class
- (Lewis, 2007.)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that questions are a check by which a teacher is able to know about the thought-process of the pupils. He is then able to give them a proper direction. If not framed properly, a teacher can change the views of the pupils. It is a technique for evaluation or an examination. It is for application of knowledge, promoting understanding and for evaluating a pupil’s learning or achievement. A teacher’s questioning skills have the potential to increase students’ classroom participation and achievement. Thus it promises improvement on the effectiveness of classroom instruction. In the end we can say that there is no hard and fast rule but Questioning is a technique learnt by experience. Intelligent handling of this technique by the teacher will result in intelligent answers and a successful teaching learning.

So I end the topic with the words from Rudyard Kipling;

“ I keep six honest serving men,

They taught me all I know,

Their names are What and Why and When,

And How and Where and Who.”