

Why do we ask questions in the classroom?

"The skills of the 21st Century will be to define the right questions not to remember the answers."

Prof. Michael Barber, New Frontiers in Learning, October 1999

As educators, let's ask ourselves, "**Why do we ask questions?**" We can ask questions:

- ...to find out if someone **understands**
- ...to test **memory/recall**
- ...to **challenge**
- ...to encourage **sharing of ideas**
- ...to stimulate **interest**
- ...to encourage **sharing of feelings**
- ...to encourage **thinking**

Let us look at that last category "**to encourage thinking**" in a bit more depth.

There are a number of taxonomies which attempted to classify learning behaviour and provide help to measure levels of learning (Bigg, Gagne, Merrill, Mager). If we borrow some theory from [Bloom's taxonomy](#), we can see that the levels of thinking mean that there should also be different levels of questioning. Bloom's taxonomy forces us to consider our reasons for asking questions. So we try to encourage our learners to think beyond mere recall. Here is a simplified summary of the hierarchy:

Recall - asking learners to remember information they have previously learnt e.g. Who? What? When? Where? etc.

Comprehension - asking pupils to make sense of something - especially in their own words e.g. What does the writer mean? Say it in your own words.

Application - asking learners to understand something and then apply it to a new situation e.g. What is important about this? What can we learn from this? How is this related to ...?

Analysis - asking learners to break something down into parts, understand the nature of those parts and how they relate to each other e.g. What are the features of? Compare and contrast. What evidence can you find for...?

Synthesis - asking learners to build or create new ideas by incorporating many bits of information. e.g. What would you predict from...? What ideas can you add to...? What might happen if you...? What solutions can you suggest for...?

Evaluation - asking learners to make judgments - especially about quality. e.g. Do you agree...? What is wrong with...? What do you think about...? What is most important...? Place in order of priority...

"Questioning is, in and of itself, important because it promotes the learning and thinking process. Thinking is driven not by answers, but by questions whereby they define tasks and delineate issues."

David Kopp

In this article David Kopp gives 6 ways to improve questioning skills

<http://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/stories/2000/04/24/editorial3.html>



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