



LEARNING POINT

What is skillful use of questions?

Skillful use of questions is one of many ways to elicit evidence of student understanding. In the formative assessment process, the teacher and students use evidence of student understanding to make adjustments that move learning forward. The teacher purposefully uses different sorts of questions to deliver content and to monitor the understanding of the class as well as keep track of individual student

deliver content and gather information about student thinking and understanding with a specific focus on who is being asked the questions, when questions are being asked, and the purpose they will serve to gather evidence of student understanding. A key aspect of skillful use of different types of questions is the planned use of questions to check for student understanding from the entire class as well

and audience for questions to deliver content and to check students' understanding.

Purpose of questions

The teacher intentionally uses a repertoire of questions in the lesson for specific purposes, such as to activate prior knowledge; review past learning; deliver content; gauge student understanding; provide students with specific, actionable, and immediate feedback; or adjust instructional strategies in relation to the learning target.

By planning in advance, the teacher is able to determine when questioning will occur, the nature of the questions to be used, and how the questions will be used for particular purposes. The teacher will often write down the questions that will be asked; when he or she will ask the questions; and whether the questions will be asked to the entire class, to a small group of students, or to select individual students.

Skillful use of questions includes the careful selection of the type of question to fit the teacher's purpose. The type of questions may vary from low cognitive-demand questions for a quick review or activating prior knowledge to high cognitive-demand questions that deepen and extend student understanding. The skillful teacher uses the full repertoire of questioning strategies carefully and thoughtfully to gather evidence of student understanding for a particular purpose.

Ultimately, the purpose of questioning in the formative assessment process is to move student learning forward. Skillful

“To question well is to teach well. In the skillful use of the question more than anything else lies the fine art of teaching; for in it we have the guide to clear and vivid ideas, the quick spur to imagination, the stimulus to thought, the incentive to action.”

CHARLES DEGARMO (1911)

understanding. Skillful use of questions is how the teacher provides opportunities for students to engage in classroom questioning routines and discussion through sharing their ideas and building on each other's ideas.

Skillful use of questions defined

Skillful use of questions is the intentional use of different questioning strategies to

as from individual students. In addition, the students understand that questioning is about the opportunity to share current understanding and explore thinking to move learning forward rather than trying to “get it right.”

Applications to practice

A teacher's skillful use of questions includes a focus on the purpose, timing,

use of questions allows the teacher to determine:

- what the learner knows,
- what the learner doesn't know,
- the extent to which a learner is linking background knowledge with newer concepts,
- any fundamental misconceptions that are getting in the way of understanding, and
- what next steps are needed to move the learning forward.

– Adapted from Fisher and Frey, (2010)

ways. The students have opportunities to practice questioning routines and understand that the teacher asks questions to provide opportunities for the students to share their ideas and build on one another's ideas.

Audience for questions

The teacher is also intentional about the audience for the questions during a lesson. This includes who will respond to the questions as well as the needs of the learners who are answering the questions. Planning for questioning allows the

acknowledge the contributions of every student to the learning process and provide time for all students to explain their thinking and also ask their own questions.

Supportive classroom culture

Classroom culture is also an important aspect of questioning. The teacher will need to cultivate a climate of trust and support students as they become familiar with the important role of questions to explore student thinking and deepen understanding. Students must be involved in understanding the new expectations and their role in the learning process as teachers increase the cognitive demand of questions and ask students to explain the reasoning for their thinking. The teacher will need to provide modeling, practice, and scaffolding as students learn new ways to work through challenging questions and explain their thinking.

Skillful use of questions nurtures a culture for thinking in the classroom, facilitates the use of feedback, and promotes a sense of student ownership in the learning process.

References:

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: principles, policy & practice*. Vol.5, Issue 1.

Degarmo, C. (1911). *Principles of Secondary Education*. Volume III, Ethical Training. Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2010). Identifying instructional moves during guided learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(2).

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“*Formative assessment is a planned process in which teachers or students use assessment-based evidence to adjust what they're currently doing.*”

JAMES POPHAM (2008)

The assessment-based evidence is then used to inform instruction, help students become more engaged in their learning, and move learning forward.

Timing of questions

The timing of questions must be carefully considered within the instructional lesson. As a teacher develops greater competence with skillful use of different types of questions to gather information on student understanding, the teacher may include a list of questions that will be asked at various points throughout the lesson. The teacher can then pose specific questions at certain moments in the lesson to monitor the understanding of the class as well as individual student understanding. In addition, the teacher will be better able to anticipate what questions may arise during the course of the lesson, and will develop skill in the spontaneous use of questions that become necessary during instruction.

The teacher plans ahead to determine the structure and questioning routines in the classroom to gather evidence of understanding from students. For example, a teacher may decide which students will be asked specific questions during conferences on a given day of the week. Structures and routines are established in the classroom, so that over time students become familiar with engaging in a variety of different types of questions in different

teacher to anticipate students' responses to questions that probe for deeper understanding, elicit discussion, and prompt exploration of ideas.

The teacher will also be aware of the discourse that may arise from questions and ensure that the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions of every student are valued equally by the teacher. Teachers should avoid calling on only certain students (e.g., only the ones who raise their hands), since this leaves other students “off the hook” and helps those students avoid active participation in the lesson. It is essential that the teacher intentionally

To learn more

Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do?

Margaret Heritage, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(2), 140-146.
<https://bit.ly/3yvG0PJ>

Framework for Thinking through Quality Questioning: Deepening Student Engagement.

J. Walsh & B. Sattes. (Corwin Press, 2011).

<https://bit.ly/3xrftw0>

Five Research Based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback.

Marianne Stenger. (*Edutopia*, August 4, 2014).

<http://bit.ly/5Tips-Stenger>

What do we mean by formative assessment?

ALN Learning Point. (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016).

<http://bit.ly/LP-FormativeAssessment>

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.