

Deepening Conversations through the Use of Differentiated Questioning Techniques

Students will generally respond to the direct question that is posed to them. How we structure our input will impact their output. If we only ask one type of question, we will only get one type of response. Consider using some of the following techniques for varying the question types in class. Varied questions lead to higher order thinking and deeper collaborative discussions.

Things to Consider:

1. Type of question (Purpose)
2. Level of Complexity (DOK)
3. Level of Language output (Hierarchy)

When working with Language Learners be mindful of your wait-time for response. It is recommend to wait a least 8 seconds for a response before moving the conversation along. Additionally, you can further prepare Language Learners to partake in whole class discussion by letting them know the questions in advance. This will allow them to formulate a response and be able to be an active participant in the group discussion.

Categories of Teacher Questions

1. Type of question (Purpose)

There are several different types of questions. They are determined by the information that you are intended to receive in the response or the type and thinking you what the students to do. Below are a few examples indicated in the work of Boaler and Brodie, 2004.

Question Type	Description	Example
Gathering Information, leading students through a process	Requires immediate response, enables students to state facts or procedure, usually had one predictable answer	What is 2 X 4?
Inserting Terminology	This allows students to talk about ideas using the correct language for the topic	What is this called?
Exploring meanings and relationships	Points to underling relationships and meanings. Makes links between ideas and representations	What does metaphor mean?
Probing and getting students to explain their	Asks students to articulate, elaborate	How did you get that?

thinking	or clarify ideas	
Generating discussions	Solicits contributions from other members of the class to move conversation along	Do you agree with __?, Do anyone have another opinion about __?
Linking and applying	Points to relationships between content ideas and other areas of learning or real life	Where else have you used this?, Does this remind you of anything else?
Extended thinking	Extends thinking to situations where similar ideas may be used	Would this work in another situation?
Orientation and focusing	Helps students to focus on key elements and aspects of the situation in order to allow for problem solving	What is this question asking you to do?, What is important about his questions?
Establishing context	Talks about ideas outside the topic that will enable links to be made with the content	What is recycling?, Who is the president of the United States?

2. Level of Complexity (DOK)

Language and cognition are two independent variables. Students at lower levels of language proficiency can respond to higher order questions when the output is structured to match their language level. In the chart below you can see that based on Bloom's Taxonomy you can expect a beginner to respond to an evaluation-based question through pointing or matching. This will allow a teacher to access evidence about what a student knows without depending on language output.

Bloom's Taxonomy Across Stages of Language Acquisition

Levels of thinking and language functions Level of thinking and academic language move from concrete recall to more complex and more abstract in any undertaking.	Language use across stages of second-language acquisition Moves from simple to complex in grammatical tenses, forms, vocabulary, etc.				
	Preproduction: (Level 1) Nonverbal response.	Early Production: (Level 2) One-word response.	Speech emergence: (Level 3) Phrases or short sentences.	Intermediate fluency: (Level 3) Longer and more complex sentences.	Advanced fluency: (Level 3) Near native-like.
Creating Appraise, argue, assess, choose, compare, defend, estimate, judge, predict, rate, select, support, value, evaluate	Teacher mismatches animal with its environment and asks: Is this the right environment? Find the right environment.	What are the best materials for the duck to build a nest?	What makes a good home for a bear? (Examine settings and evaluate: "A cave makes a good home.")	What would happen if you put a worm in the desert?	Recommend a different environment for a mother duck to raise her ducklings. Defend your choice.
Evaluating Arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up	Point to the animals that live in the soil.	Say the names of the animals that live in the soil.	How could you change a scorpion so it could swim?	What would a camel need to survive in the desert?	How would you protect the wildlife in a forest where hiking was popular?
Analyzing Analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test	Show me an animal that cannot lie in the forest.	Name the parts of a fish that help it live in the water.	How are raccoons and squirrels the same? How are they different?	How does a bear use its claws to catch fish? Gather berries?	Why do you think a bear hibernates in winter?
Applying Apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use	Show me what would happen I we put the fish in the desert.	Tell me what would happen if we put a fish in the desert.	How could you change the body of a fish to make it fly?	How would you capture and transport scorpions to a zoo?	How would a deer camouflage itself in the forest in winter? In the desert?
Understanding Classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate	Show me where a deer lives.	Tell me which animals eat meat.	Why is a toad the color it is?	Explain how a snake catches its prey.	Why do fish need gills to live in the water? How do gills work?
Remembering Arrange, order, define, duplicate, label, list, name, recognize, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce	Where is the raccoon?	What is the name of this animal?	What are the body parts of a turtle?	Give the definition of a mammal.	Tell me everything you know about a clam.

Source: Adapted from *Bloom's Taxonomy*, *Halliday's language Functions*, and *Krashen's Stages of Language Acquisition*. Contributors: Mike Gaddis and Cynthia Bjork. As shown on the Journal of the National Staff Development Council, Winter 2008.

3. Level of Language Output (Hierarchy)

When providing instruction to a diverse classroom of language learners, it is important to differentiate questions so everyone has an opportunity to participate. In the chart below you can see how the level of language output increases as you move up the hierarchy of questions. This is a guideline for opening up the conversation to all learners.

Question Type/Outcome	Description	Example
Pointing/prompting	This is not actually a question but it is good for language learners at the beginning level to demonstrate basic knowledge	Point to the boy who is holding a book
Simple Yes/No	This question type can also use visual cues. It allows beginners to respond with one word, yes/no.	Is the book on the desk?
Either/or	This question type also allows students to respond with one word. The key word for the response is embedded in the question.	Is the book blue or green?
Simple What? How? Where?	These questions require a short response and are not cognitively complex.	What is the boy wearing?, How did you get to school?
Complex questions with support	These questions are a bit more difficult and require a longer response but they can be broken into several steps to help scaffold the learners response	Look at these books. They are all different sizes. Which one is the biggest? How many pages do you think it has?
Open Ended	These questions are broad and can have a variety of responses. These are generally the most difficult type because they are unsupported.	How are books made? Why is it important to read?