Questioning Techniques for Education Personnel and Families To Support Student Learning in a Distance Environment

Good questioning techniques have a strong positive effect on student learning, whether in a classroom or a distance learning environment. Here are some of the benefits of good questions:

- They encourage students to engage in the work and motivate them to want to learn more
- They help students process the learning
- They help build critical thinking skills
- They allow the adults (teachers, support personnel, families) to check for understanding

There are two types of questioning: open questioning and closed questioning. Closed questioning requires one certain answer. They are helpful when you need a quick check of basic understanding or are trying to clear up confusion.

Here are some examples of closed questioning:

- What does 6 + 6 equal? (Requires the answer “12”)
- Are you feeling better today? (Requires a “yes” or “no” answer)
- What color was Little Red Riding Hood’s cape? (Requires the answer “red”)
- When did the War of 1812 begin? (Requires the answer “1812”)

While there are some advantages to closed questioning, there are many more disadvantages. Students who are afraid of getting the wrong answer simply may not answer. This type of questioning does not allow for an opinion or an expanded answer, and doesn’t offer the opportunity for students to provide reasoning.

Open questioning requires deeper thinking and provides an opportunity for students to reflect, to challenge what they may be hearing or reading, to offer feelings and opinions, and to come up with even more questions.

Here are some examples of effective open questions:

- Why do you think the book ended the way it did?
- How did the War of 1812 affect the American economy?
- Why are you feeling better today than yesterday?
- Analyze the actions of the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood. Why do you think the wolf was acting the way he was?
- How did you get the math answer that you did? Explain your thinking and processes.

While open questioning requires a longer answer, which is basically the only possible disadvantage (depending on time and format), the benefits clearly outweigh that disadvantage. Open questioning breeds deeper learning. The powerful questions are **how and why**, and some strong verbs to use are **analyze, compare, evaluate, and explain**. They can be used for all ages of students.

Subject Area	Effective Question Examples
Arts	• How do those colors make you feel? • Explain why the painter would use that perspective. • What is meant by “music is a universal language”? Explain. • What can the art forms of other cultures teach us about life? • How can we use the arts to inspire action?
English Language Arts (Reading, writing)	• How can you make writing come alive for the reader? Explain some techniques and why they are effective. • Why do you think the author wrote this story/book/etc.? • How can we use story writing and storytelling to solve everyday problems? • How did the author make a convincing case? (This is good for opinion texts, persuasive speeches, etc.) • Describe the tone of the text. Why do you think the author wrote it this way? • How did the author’s use of figurative language add to the tone/theme/meaning of the text?
Health	• What does it mean to be truly healthy? • What personal qualities do you have to help you deal with conflict or stress? • Explain how keeping hydrated helps you to stay healthy.
Mathematics	• How did you choose the strategy you used to solve the problem? • What mathematical questions could we ask about this model? • Explain your thinking when solving this equation. How else could a person solve it? • How can exponential growth help us in understanding what to do in different situations?
Science	• Why do you think speed is different from velocity? • Can you construct a model that would explain…? • What data was used to make the conclusion that…? Explain your thinking. • How would you apply what you’ve learned to a new situation? • Why don’t polar bears have white noses? • Why does a candle go out when you blow on it? • What claims can you make based on this evidence?
Social Studies	• How do we overcome prejudice and discrimination? • Compare/contrast the economic effects of World War I with those of World War II • How does oppression and power relate to each other? Explain your thinking. • What does it mean to be a “good citizen”? • How does conflict lead to change? • How can we be sure what really happened in our past? • Was the U. S. Westward Expansion beneficial for everyone? Why or why not? • What narrative is absent in this text/article/reading/picture? How does the inclusion of that narrative shape your understanding of the event?