

## How can we develop adults' skills in answering open questions?

### Independent evidence

Open questions that require students to find their own words are the most useful form of questioning to develop student understanding. These might take the form of challenging (how/ why did you do that?), checking (do you know...?), uncovering thinking (can you explain this?), offering strategies (have you thought about....?), or re-assuring (are you happy with that?). Sometimes a 'devil's advocate' question (are you sure?) can be useful. In this way, teachers shift from being presenters of content to facilitators exploring ideas that the students are involved with **i**.

### Your evidence and reflections

Adults who have been out of education for some time, or who are used to teachers conveying information rather than probing thinking, may find it awkward to answer challenging questions or find them intimidating. You can test how prepared your learners are to respond to such questions by putting them as comments on work you are handing back. For example, where a student has given a particular response, you might write 'have you thought about ...?' Once students have their work back, ask them to respond to your questions in writing, and take these in for consideration.

### Putting the evidence to work

Once students have completed the exercise, ask them how they felt about the process. Did it help, and if so how? Were there types of questions they found more useful than others? You might also ask them about how they would feel if you introduced more questions like this in classroom discussions. What sort of support might they want to feel confident about being challenged? Would more pair work be useful, for example.

**i Find out more about** the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) Post Compulsory commentaries:

[www.tlrp.org/findings/post\\_comp\\_findings/post\\_comp\\_findings.html](http://www.tlrp.org/findings/post_comp_findings/post_comp_findings.html)

Follow this link to find out what adult learners think about learning:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/listeningtolearners/default.htm>

Find out more about collaborative learning in adult education at:

<http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9220/adult.htm>