

What kind of questions do we ask our pupils?

Research taster

Common reasons teachers give for using questioning are (in order of perceived importance):

- encouraging thought and understanding of ideas
- checking understanding, knowledge and skills
- gaining attention to task, warming-up, moving towards a specific teaching point
- information, recall, review, revision, reinforcement.

In practice, though, we may find that our questions to pupils tend to be concerned with recalling facts .

Your evidence

Gathering evidence about the way you interact with your pupils can help you to develop your pupils' thinking and understanding. One way you could do this would be to record a teaching session on audiotape. When you listen to the tape, you could record how often you ask questions designed to:

- recall factual information (eg. "Where is Ethiopia?")
- gain attention (eg. Are you listening Wayne?")
- check understanding (eg. "Why do you think that?")
- encourage thought (eg. "What do you really think happened?")

What do you notice about the kind of questions you use with your pupils?

Moving forward

You might like to see if you can increase the number of questions you ask that check your pupils' understanding and encourage them to think and reflect. Would you find it helpful to work with a colleague to devise and practice asking such higher-order questions? Afterwards, you could audiotape another of your lessons to see whether you used more higher-order questions with your pupils.

Find out more

You can find out more about how effective questioning helps pupils to learn on the TLRP Learning how to learn project at: <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase11/phase2f.html>

You can find out more about using dialogue to probe pupils' understanding and develop their thinking on the GTC's Research of the Month website at: http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/romtopics/rom_teachingandlearning/effective_talk/

Short summaries of research on the theme of speaking and listening are available on The Research Informed Practice site at: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/speakandlisten/?digest=all>

You can find more further reading suggestions on the theme of communication in the classroom at: <http://www.rtweb.info/ch12/nfr12.html>

You can find out more about different types of questions at: <http://www.rtweb.info/diagrams/fig13-1.html>