

# Questioning - putting questions in categories

When students begin to label the different kinds of questions, they learn to select different kinds of questions to perform different kinds of thinking. No matter what the level of schooling, some kind of label can work effectively.

Teach students that questions are like tools in a tool box. They would not pull out a screw driver to saw a board. Nor would they use a hammer to unscrew a bolt. Jobs require a choice to tool. Thinking requires a choice of questions. For most students who have never thought consciously about how they think or question, the thinking tools lie unsorted, unlabeled and unidentifiable in the bottom of the box. They tend to reach into the box and pull out the first tool (or question) that comes to hand (or Mind). This leads to hammering instead of sawing, planing instead of drilling.

To introduce students to the idea of categorizing questions, bring in a tool box of tools and ask them to suggest how they might be organized in the toolbox based on what they do. An alternative manipulative activity is to ask students to sort colored shapes into categories based first on color, then on shape, then on both. For older students use figures with multiple characteristics, such as complex geometrical figures, or something familiar and interesting to them such as the latest movies - "Put the last five movies you saw into categories based on how you liked them, their subject matter, their general popularity, their style, their characters, their plot, or their related economic factors."

Primary students may begin with three or four types of questions. As they scan the questions generated at the beginning of a unit, they may come up with types such as "Fact Questions" and "Why Questions" and "Imagine Questions." Or they may find other names. It does not really matter, for the important thing is to start them thinking about questions. The more time you devote to thinking about questions, the more likely they are to discover new types of questions that do not fit nearly into their first typology. The class should then discuss the new type and agree upon the wisdom of including it.

Put your classroom questioning typology to work with your homework assignments. If students read an assignment, let them form questions for the next day's discussion. Research substantiates improved comprehension scores for students who question as they read. Ask them to:

- write three comparison questions about the story they are reading;
- find the most interesting question left unanswered by the reading;
- identify the question the author was trying to answer;
- write a question that will demand at least ten minutes of thought to answer;
- find a question which has no answer, or two thousand answers or an infinite number of answers;
- ask a question that is the child of a bigger question that they can then ask the class to identify.

Ask them to identify the most important and the least important questions. They will discover that in the beginning, there are many unimportant questions, but only a few profound ones. Those that matter grow and expand to give birth to many more of their own kind.

If the homework is skill oriented (algebra problems or word problems), have them jot down three questions that bothered them or stimulated them or intrigued them as they did their work. Ask them to keep track of the question that "got them unstuck" after they had been stuck on a problem for a while. Ask them to list the questions they asked at the end of the assignment to assess the quality of their effort.

These are the tools of learning how to learn that enable the student to cope when the standard approach fails. Even knowing that there are alternate routes to a goal can give them the will when they need it to keep searching.

*from Jamie McKenzie - <http://www.fno.org/toolbox.html#Beginning>*