

Adapted From:

Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). *Teaching from a Research Knowledge Base.*
New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Questioning & Responding

Key Findings

- Questions can serve a range of purposes including guiding instruction, managing the classroom, and influencing student achievement.
- Questioning techniques that improve student engagement include asking clear questions, probing for answers, and redirecting.
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- Developing an effective questioning strategy is a complex process that should attend to cognitive level, clarity, and the sequence of questions.
- When teachers help students improve their answers, students' willingness to participate, the quality of their answers, and the level of their thinking are all improved.
- Student questions give teachers information about comprehension, academic focus, and different levels of learning.

Focused Observation Guide: Teacher Questions

[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *What questions does the teacher ask during the lesson?* Write down the questions asked by the teacher. This may be difficult when lessons are moving at a fast pace, but record the questions as completely as possible.

Analyze/Apply: Effective teachers are strategic in the questions they ask. Careful planning is needed so that the cognitive level and difficulty of questions will be consistent with teacher expectations, learner objectives, and student characteristics. After the observation, examine the questions to determine how productive they were. Determine if the questions are directly related to the learning objectives. Look for questions that focus, extend, or assess student comprehension. Also, compare the number of content-related questions and the number of procedural or nonacademic questions. Identify any key questions that were used to promote student understanding. Analyze the sequencing of the questions.

Apply this new learning by planning specific questions for an upcoming lesson. Remember to include a range of questions that are directly related to the learning objectives, are phrased clearly and concisely, are not yes-no nor fill-in-the-blank questions. Maintain a conversational tone in delivering questions.

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Focused Observation Guide: Teacher Use of Wait Time during Questioning

[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *How does the teacher use wait time?* Obtain a digital watch (or one with a second hand) to record wait time. Be sure to record both wait time I (how many seconds the teacher waits after asking a question before allowing a student response) and wait time II (how many seconds the teacher waits to react to student responses).

Listen carefully to the first few words of the questions. Jot down those words, noting the time as the teacher completes the question. Now record the number of seconds the teacher waits before allowing a student response. For example,

- What is. . . . (1 sec.)
- How did the first. . . . (3 sec.)
- How do the two processes differ? (2 sec.)
- Imagine if you were. . . , what would be. . . . (3 sec.)

It is not critical that you record each instance of wait time. You are attempting to document a representative sample. For the second part of the task, you need to record the number of seconds that elapse between student responses and teacher comments.

Analyze/Apply: Research supports the practice of waiting after high-level questions (Wait Time I) and after student responses (Wait Time II) which results in higher levels of achievement and improved student attitudes. Review the notes to determine the relationship between the length of wait time and the level of processing required by the questions. The teacher can readily distinguish lower level questions from the more complex questions. Use your notes to decide if the amount of wait time, both I and II, was adequate to promote high quality student thinking. It is recommended that teachers continue to devise ways to extend the use of wait time before and after more complex questions and after student responses to raise the quality and quantity of student thinking.

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Focused Observation Guide: Directing Students to Respond during Questioning

[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *How do teachers direct the students to respond to questions?* Record the ways the teacher allows students to respond. Note what the teacher says to cue the students to respond as a group (choral responses). Also record cues that communicate expected think time. Make notes in the form of rules that seem to guide the way the class operates, such as: students must be recognized by the teacher before responding, called out answers are accepted, students are encouraged to take risks and venture guesses.

Analyze/Apply: Review the notes to identify patterns of student participation. Tallies of choral, volunteer, and nonvolunteer responses to indicate the dominant ways students responded. Decide which cues that signal expected responding behavior were effective in encouraging wide student participation. Identify techniques that teachers use to effectively cue student participation and encourage more students to actively participate.

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Focused Observation Guide: Student Participation during Questioning

[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]

Observe: *How do students respond to questions?* Obtain a seating chart prior to the observation or draw a rough classroom diagram and identify students as they are recognized. As individual students respond, place a checkmark in the student's space. For most student responses you can also identify correct responses with a plus (+) and incorrect responses with a minus (-). Additional notes could include student hesitations, questions asked, tallies of choral responses, and instances of no response.

Analyze/Apply: Analyze the observation chart to determine the distribution of response opportunities. Make a decision about how actively engaged students were in the discussion. The observation data should also give information about the level of difficulty of the questions. Determine the appropriateness of the questions based on the pattern of correct versus incorrect answers. Identify the elements teachers need to consider in providing response opportunities during questioning activities.

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Focused Observation Guide: Teacher Reaction to Student Response during Questioning *[Links to VI. Communication A. of the TN Framework for Evaluation and Professional Development]*

Observe: *How do teachers react to student answers?* Attend only to the statements and actions teachers take in reacting to student answers. It may be impossible to write the complete reaction but attempt to record key words or phrases. Or you may prefer to tally teacher reactions in the following categories:

- No visible reaction
- Nonverbal reaction
- Accepts answer
- Restates answer
- Expands answer
- Rates answer
- Probes with the same student
- Redirects to another student
- Other (describe)

Analyze/Apply: Use your notes to tally and identify the most common reactions to student responses. Determine which reactions seem to foster student engagement and learning. It is important for teachers to develop a range of supportive reacting behaviors based on the characteristics of the students both collectively and individually. The intent is to encourage continued engagement and risk taking. It is important for teachers to understand that the way a teacher reacts to student responses determines whether that student will be willing to respond again.

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