

Questions!
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Question starters aimed at:

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My attempts to understand and use the Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching and learning have made me realise just how important language can be in weaving a web of engagement, commitment, trust and respect in the classroom. The words we use have enormous potential as tools for empowerment, unity and inclusion; or as weapons of restriction, isolation and diktat.

As teachers, the nature of the questions we ask signal to our children what we value. Personally speaking, I want every word, every gesture, every glance to convey my belief that they matter as individuals; their opinions matter; their home experiences matter; and as a class, we can, and will, call upon these personal resources to collectively shape our learning.

I found that traditional questioning approaches immediately distanced me from the children; I was structuring my classroom environment to create a feeling of community and respect, but my questioning style was practically Gestapo-esque! Something had to change and, thanks to a great deal of reading and the opportunities to work with some leading Mantle of the Expert practitioners, I think I'm beginning to get there.

The question starters in this booklet have been collected from a variety of sources. They are not the only ways of structuring questions, but perhaps they are a useful collection to dip into for people, like me, who feel that their questioning could improve. At first viewing, their structure may seem to fly in the face of orthodoxy: there are few, if any, whys, wheres or whos included. All I would say is, give some of them a go and see what happens.

I've heard that Dorothy Heathcote believes a question to be any utterance that provokes a verbal response. Perhaps like some people reading this, I was sceptical to begin with. But now....

Activating and transforming knowledge / understanding

- Do we know much about...?
- I don't know what it says in the books about...?
- Does anyone know...?
- Is it true that...?
- Because...?
- Is there any reason...?
- Is there a way to...?
- I've never understood...
- I've often wondered why...
- I just can't imagine...

Considering another point of view / injecting new information

- They do say that...
- Some people think...
- It's common for people to...
- I've heard that...
- Had anyone thought that...?
- There might be others who think...

Bringing attention to, studying, analysing

- It's odd that you don't seem to see / hear about...
- It does seem strange that...
- Did it seem that...?
- Did anybody notice...?
- Can you make out that word / symbol?
- Isn't there a...?
- Are you noticing anything about...?
- I think he might be trying to tell us something.
- Could you tell whether...?
- I don't know about you, but it's making me think that...
- You'd think that...
- You'd guess that...

Considering implications

- I don't know. Do you think it would really help?
- Surely, we couldn't...
- That must mean that...
- So, perhaps we need to...
- There must be a reason for...
- So, there might be...
- What might it mean?
- Will this mean...?
- Will this affect...?
- Have we thought about the consequences of that?
- Does that allow us to...?
- People usually do things for a reason...
- I guess it's possible that...
- Does it make you feel / think that...?
- We don't want to.....or do we?
- If we're going to... I guess we'd need to...

Deepening / connecting / reflecting

- Just think, we're not the only ones who've...
- I wonder whether other people have been faced with this same problem?
- It makes you think that problems like this have troubled people in many different places and times.
- I guess it's a bit like...
- So kind of like when...
- That makes me think of the time when...
- Do we feel differently about that now?
- Did it make you think that...?
- Did it seem to you...?
- Do you get the feeling that...?

Hypothesising

- Now, supposing...
- Suppose that...
- If people would let us...
- It could be that...
- I would guess that if....
- If we could...
- Maybe...
- Perhaps...
- It makes me think what would happen if...
- I mean, if it were true that...
- Would it be good if...?
- Are you guys happy to go along with this and see where it leads?

Offering choices

- Which...?
- We'll need to choose whether...
- It seems, from what you're saying, that...
- Do you want to... or ...?
- Given the situation, we could ... or ...
- Is there an argument for doing one of these tasks before the others?

Acknowledging / summarising

- It's clear that...
- I can see that...
- Like you, I think that...
- After all of our efforts, we've...
- So, we're saying that...
- Shall we remind ourselves...?
- It seems that we've decided...
- You seem to be saying...
- We seem to have achieved...?

Seeking agreement

- For now / for a bit, can we agree that...?
- Is it possible for us to...?
- Do you think we could...?
- Can we do a ...?
- Do you mind if...?
- For a while, could we...?
- At the moment, can we agree to...?
- Can we live with that?

Directing

- We're going to need to have...
- We'll / we'd need to...
- Would you like to see...?
- Should there be...?
- Had we better...?
- If we're going to... I guess we'd need to...
- Perhaps, we might need to...
- Can we, just for a moment...
- Let's see if we could...
- Just have a little look...
- Just go over there for a moment and...
- We'll have to make sure...
- Might we be able...?
- We can look now at...

- Would you give a bit of time to...?
- Shall I/we...?
- There must be time for us to...
- Can we work in such a way...?
- No doubt, there'll come a time when...

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