Standards Unit

IMPROVING DIFFERENTIATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

TOPIC 2: QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Activity 2: Which questioning techniques? (1 hr, 30 mins)

Objectives

- To identify and explore a range of questioning techniques for individuals and groups.
- To identify appropriate questioning techniques in teaching situations.
- To evaluate questioning techniques for individuals and groups.

Facilitator notes

This activity on questioning techniques is divided into tasks that encourage participants to recognise and evaluate question types and techniques. Participants will have the opportunity to explore different types of question, how they're used and their impact on learners and learning.

PowerPoint slides

The objectives above are shown on Slide 6.

Use Slide 7 at the end of Activity 2 to summarise.

The main objective in this session is to encourage participants to recognise and explore questioning opportunities. Some participants may not ever use questioning as a tool, whilst others may use the tool without much consideration as to its value in helping differentiate learners' needs and develop learning.

Task 1 gives participants an opportunity to investigate the skill base required for different types of question. Participants will need to identify the level of skill the different questions demand of the learner and consider which of the following skills they want the learner to demonstrate: knowledge, understanding/ application, analysis and evaluation. This will help participants to become aware of how to differentiate and to target questions more thoughtfully.

The skill levels should be written as headings on sheets of flipchart paper and given to each group.

Now read the activity.

Task 1: Question types (in groups of three to five) (40 mins)

Resources

- Laminated strips with questions (Stage 1)
- Laminated grid with questioning strategies (Stage 2)
- Red, amber and green pens (Stage 2)
- Flipchart paper
- White or blue tack
- PowerPoint Slides 6 and 7

Stage 1 (20 mins)

You will be provided with a set of cards. Each card has a question on it.

Place the cards face upwards on the table so that all members of the group can see them.

As a group, pick out one question card at a time. Through discussion, identify which of the skill-level categories shown below the question would be most likely targeted by that kind of question. These skill-level categories are placed as headings on flipchart paper.

The skill-level categories are:

- knowledge;
- understanding/application;
- analysis;
- evaluation.

When you have decided on a question's skill level, place the question on the appropriate sheet of the flipchart. You may find that a question card could be suitable for more than one category. In these cases you should try to reach an agreement as a group on which category to put it in.

Facilitator notes

Once participants have completed the exercise you should examine the types of question they've associated with each skill level. Although there will not always be a right answer, it's clear that certain questions (such as 'what's the meaning of?', 'do you recognise this?') will be directed more at knowledge and application than analysis and evaluation.

During feedback you should get participants to justify their decisions and to listen to each other's decisions. This will encourage them to think more clearly about:

- why they are targeting a particular question at a particular learner;
- what skills or knowledge they are checking and developing;

- how they might adjust their approaches to differentiate better.

To extend this task, ask participants to read the following case study and use it to prepare differentiated questions for a range of learners. They can then share the questions they've prepared and discuss why they're appropriate for a particular type of learner.

Stage 2 (20 mins)

Read the case study on the next page and use it to prepare differentiated questions for a range of learners.

Fictional case study

In 1950 Ellis and Sons (drapers) and Baker and Co (furnishings) began trading as separate businesses in adjoining high-street shops. In 1970 the two family businesses merged and became Ellis and Baker Ltd, trading in a single high-street department store employing 60 people. An additional business was opened in a nearby out-of-town retail park in 1995.

John Ellis was the group managing director and knew that in order for Ellis and Baker Ltd to remain competitive it would have to be restructured and moved nearer to the newly developed town centre. John Ellis put the following proposals to shareholders:

- close and sell the high street site for redevelopment;
- close the out-of-town retail park store;
- open a new furnishing and carpet business in a location more central to the new town centre.

These proposals were accepted and in 2002 a new shop was purchased which was more central to the town centre. Money from the sale of the high street store was spent on refurbishing the shop and warehouse, and installing information and communications technology (ICT). Some of the employees of the high street department store who did not want to move accepted redundancy after discussion with their trade union, whilst most staff from the retail park store transferred to the new furniture and carpet store near the town centre.

After trading for a year, Ellis and Baker remains confident of success. John Ellis recognises the high level of competition in the furniture business and is always looking for suppliers at home and abroad of quality products at reasonable prices. John Ellis and the ICT director have developed a web site and have plans for selling this site at home and abroad. Wide use is made of ICT throughout the business.

Task 2: Questioning techniques (in a group) (25 mins)

Facilitator notes

This task asks participants to think about a range of questioning techniques and how they would use them. In particular, they will think about how the different strategies can be used to meet different needs of learners. Through completing a grid, participants will have to make judgements about the impact their questioning techniques are likely to have on outcome criteria such as 'learner feedback', 'participation rate', etc. Although there may not always be clear-cut right or wrong answers, we have provided an answer sheet giving an indication of likely responses. This can be handed out at the end of the activity.

Now read the activity.

Resources

A laminated grid 'What are these techniques good for?'.

A document listing the questioning techniques from the grid in larger type size.

Red, amber and green pens (see below for an explanation of what these ratings mean).

As a group, select one strategy at a time from the list headed 'Questioning techniques'. Discuss how effective that questioning technique is in relation to the criteria set out along the top of the grid (also repeated below). For example, does the questioning technique involve just one learner? If so, then the participation rate will probably be poor and so you will colour the box headed 'Participation' in red.

Criteria:

- teacher or trainer gets feedback – teacher or trainer gets representative feedback on quality of learners' reasoning and understanding;
- learners get feedback – learners receive feedback on the quality of their understanding, ideally improving it as a result;
- learner participation rate – a high proportion of learners are engaged in trying to answer question;
- learner thinking time – learners are likely to spend time thinking productively about the question and the quality of answer;
- learner comfort – learners are not put on the spot and are unlikely to feel humiliated by the teacher, trainer or fellow learners;
- teacher or trainer observations – the teacher or trainer can think and tailor strategies for individuals or group.

Ratings:

Green = Good   Amber = OK   Red = Poor

Facilitator notes

Your plenary discussion should focus on when these types of questioning techniques would be best used. Ask participants to think about the circumstances in which they would use them – it will not always be advantageous to use those strategies with the most green squares. However, these types of strategy tend to give a more comprehensive set of outcomes.

Before the discussion you may want to ask groups to display their grid on the wall and spend a few minutes viewing each other's decisions.

Task 3: Which questioning techniques to use when? (group) (25 mins)

Facilitator notes

This task asks participants to give further thought to when it would be beneficial to use each of these strategies.

For each of the questioning techniques, decide as a group how, when and where they are best used. The group should put this information in the blank space available on the questioning strategies grid under the heading 'When?' You can use the following headings as examples to support your decisions and the group can add extra headings to the list.

- Introducing a topic for the first time to a group.
- Imparting theory/information.
- Developing understanding.
- Provoking thought and the development of ideas.
- Encouraging analysis and evaluation.
- Revising a topic area.
- Sharing ideas.

Facilitator notes

With the whole group draw together the three tasks. You may want to do so using the following discussion questions.

1. Are there any obstacles to using various questioning techniques? If so, what are they?

2. Do you have to use all techniques at every stage?

3. How do you modify the techniques to suit specific conditions?

Slide 7 provides a summarising review of the three tasks.

This discussion can be used to lead into the third activity of the session. This is a role-play where participants put into practice the questioning techniques and structures explored in this session.