Differentiation

QUESTION POSING

Responding to content-related questions provides learners with opportunities to expand their thinking in more cognitively demanding ways. Moreover, how questions are posed gives learners practice in using language in a variety of ways, ranging from simple to complex. This Bulletin describes three ways to consider posing questions to English Language Learners (ELLs): learning styles differences, Bloom’s Taxonomy, and language proficiency.

POsing QUESTions by DIFFerentiated Learning Styles

Question posing can be addressed from mastery, problem-solving, reflective or metaphorical perspectives, depending on a learner’s natural style of learning.

Mastery. This type of questioning can be generated to appeal to learners having a natural proclivity for remembering factual information (approximately 35% of the general population of learners). They elicit factual responses including recall, observation, sequencing, categorizing, following directions, naming, and listing. They typically incorporate ‘wh’ (who, where, when, etc.) questions for obtaining information. An example from science might be “What are the four seasons of the year?”

Problem-Solving. These questions appeal to learners whose proclivity is reasoning (approximately 15% of the general population). They are posed to generate inference, comparison & contrast, evaluation, deduction, and summary, and typically incorporate higher order thinking responses. An example from social studies is "Why did slavery divide the North from the South?"

Reflective. Reflective questions can be either inter- and/or intrapersonal to appeal to learners with a reflective learning style (approximately 35% of the general population). They enable learners to respond empathically, to share, to foster self-awareness, or to relate interpersonally with others. An example from literature is "How did you feel reading the last scene from Hamlet?"

Metaphorical. Questions of this type are for learners who have a creative learning style (approximately 15% of the general population). They involve questions that elicit application or synthesis of information, imagination, metaphorical thinking, and creativity. An example from math is "Using the formula for a rectangle, design a series of tables to fit into a room for 20 measuring 600 square feet".

Questions which are posed on the basis of learning style differences have the
benefit of appealing to a learner's natural way of learning. As a result, they can be inherently more motivating. All learners, however, need practice with all of the above question types.

A TAXONOMY FOR STRATEGIC QUESTION POSING

Bloom’s Taxonomy provides a simple and effective way to pose questions in an increasingly complex manner. **Knowledge.** The simplest level of question posing requires learners to recall explicit or written information through "wh" questions:

- Who in the story was responsible?
- What happened after?
- Where does the process end?
- Which is true or false?

**Comprehension.** This level of questioning is recalling information through paraphrasing:

- In your own words...
- Explain...
- Tell about...
- Describe...

**Application.** This level of questions asks learners to demonstrate understanding using other contexts:

- What is another example of...
- How is/are...different?
- Demonstrate the way to...
- Could this have happened in...

**Analysis.** This level of question posing requires making connections beyond the level of the text through inference:

- Why...?
- If...then...
- What conclusions can you draw from...

**Synthesis.** This involves creating something new on the basis of what is already known:

- How do you design a...
- Suppose...
- What if...

Create a new and useful use for...
How would you deal with...
Imagine that...

**Evaluation.** Questions of this type involve judging the adequacy of information:

- What is your opinion of...
- What do you think will be the outcome?
- What is the best/worst...
- Rate the value of...

POISING QUESTIONS SENSITIVE TO LANGUAGE COMPLEXITY

Mainstreamed ELLs engaged in content learning may know the information but not understand how to provide the answer due to the language complexity of the question. In posing questions, do not eliminate posing the question in a complex way, but "parenthesize" by asking in a similar, but simpler, way in addition to posing the question in original form.

Parenthesizing is done by:
1) Transforming the question into a statement, followed by a one-word 'wh' question word;
2) using a simple past, present, or future verb tense form; and/or
3) substituting a simpler word.

The following is an example based on the Cinderella story:

**Original:** Why do you think the fairy set up strict time limits for Cinderella?

**Parenthesized:** The fairy wanted Cinderella to come home at midnight. Why?

**Sources:**


Silver, Harvey F. (2000). ASCD Presentation, Boston, MA.