**MAKE YOUR QUESTIONS COUNT (Secondary)**

Look at the kinds of questions you typically ask. Are they:

Assessment Questions, Open Questions, or Engagement Questions/Requests?

Think of your questions as the shapers of your dialogue with students. Different kinds of questions will lead children in different directions, so you need to know how and why that happens.

**1. Assessment Questions**

Here are a few examples of this kind of question. Notice that these ask for concrete pieces of information that can be verified or quantified. In each case, a teacher asks for very specific answers from one child:

*“Sam, what is the capital city of Australia?”*

*“Who is the main character of Hard Times?”* [Looks at Rosie]

*“How much rain typically falls in Spain during March, Ben?”*

Surely, assessment questions have a place in your repertoire. In fact, it would be unlikely of impossible to avoid them. Just be careful not to rely on them because they land on one child at a time who offers one answer, correctly or incorrectly. Think about the other students. In a class of 26, while one responds to an assessment question, 25 others do little more than listen, or not listen. If you rely too often, of for too long, on assessment questions, you run the risk of relying on too few students doing the work while too many of the others snooze, metaphorically. Simply put, the snoozers aren’t learning.

As we speak, you may have children coming to your class already adept at or accustomed to “hiding” from questions. Sadly, some students as young as 1st graders have learned that if they don’t raise their hands when questions are asked, they avoid an expectation to focus. That is, they avoid being part of the learning process. So remember this: Assessment questions do serve a limited purpose. Key word: Limited.

**2. Open Questions**

These may be a bit more engaging for students than assessment questions. Both of these types of questions require answers that contain specific pieces of information, but open questions ask something a bit broader. Think of open questions as fishing expeditions, like these:

*“What Australian cities have you read about?”*

*“What do you think the main character is thinking?”*

Sometimes, in an effort to make an open question engaging, a teacher might use mock urgency to spark an answer:

*“Quick! Tell me what kind of chart you see on page one?”*

Like assessment questions, open questions serve only very limited purposes. Be wise about those limitations, or avoid open questions entirely. For sure, *don’t overuse them* even if you really, really appreciate the three kids who answer ALL of them. What usually happens, interestingly enough, is that the first call-out *is* on topic; the second may or may not be on topic; the third call-out is probably something like *“What time is lunch?”* And the thread of the lesson gets lost while you attempt to squelch the bad behavior.

**3. Engagement Questions/Statements**

They’re not the holy grail of student engagement, but they do add important dimensions to class participation. The most important element of this kind of statement is the tactic you place inside it. Into your wording can be a response vehicle each child should climb aboard. It can be a student-signal like *“Hold up your right hand if you think the answer is X minus 3; hold up your left if it is X plus 3.”* Or it could be an number of other tactics like,  *“Write the main character’s name in the air,”* or *“Raise the number of fingers as there are on Hispaniola.”*

The point is that engagement questions don’t just motivate student involvement in the answer; they require it. The student who doesn’t hold up a hand, air-write, or raise fingers ia a student who is telling you something nevertheless – that he or she doesn’t know the answer. And that is an answer in itself. (Or the student isn’t paying attention, and now you know it.)

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| **Re-Phrase questions for Engagement** | | |
| Plan some of your questions in advance. One approach is to script a few questions you would typically ask during a given lesson. Next, re-phrase the question as an Engagement/Statement. For practice, look at the questions below. In the second column, list the type of questions (Assessment or Open). In the third column, change the question to an engagement response. | | |
| **Questions you want students to answer** | **Type of question (Assessment or Open)** | **Ways to re-phrase for engagement** |
| *“Raise your hand if you can name the antagonist in our text.”* |  |  |
| *“Ellen, what is X equal to?* |  |  |
| *“What is the chemical symbol for calcium?”* |  |  |
| *“Which of the explorers would you like to go to dinner with?* |  |  |