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Questioning skills

Questioning in teaching and learning is frequently taken for granted, but it is a skill which needs conscious development if we are to become effective teachers. The following summary outlines some of the most important questioning skills:

- Create an appropriate climate in which learners will want to ask questions.
- Express questions clearly. Avoid over-long and complex structures; try not to use two-part questions.
- Use appropriate volume and speed of speech – ensure that learners can hear you.
- Ensure that the content and language of questions are appropriate to the learners. This entails knowing your learners; one way we get to know our learners is by questioning them.
- Avoid questions which are too easy or too difficult for that group. Be prepared to ask differentiated questions with learners of different abilities in the same group.
- Put questions into context and provide necessary background information.
- Make sure you pause and allow learners thinking time – teachers can get nervous if answers don't come immediately. You could consider using collaboration in which pairs of learners work together to provide an answer.
- Use prompts and provide clues to help learners get to the answers. Questions can be part of the 'scaffolding' process which provides initial support for learners to reach new heights in their learning.(see Chapter 3 Learning Theories)
- Use follow-up questions to extend thinking and make greater cognitive demands on learners. Encourage learners thinking skills by using higher-order questions. Develop linked questions.
- Involve the whole group not just a 'favoured few'. Distribute questions around the group and use people's names to invite them in. When a learner asks a question, ensure the whole group is listening.
- Acknowledge and give praise to learners' answers, even if they are not what you were looking for or expected.
- Never make light of or disregard learners' responses. Make them feel that their contributions are valued.
- Remember the importance of non-verbal communication –especially, smiles; eye-contact; tone of voice – in encouraging learners.

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