

Adult-Child Interaction Strategies

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Synopsis: Asking children questions that have right or wrong answers may limit their language development and limit their problem-solving abilities. Instead, parents and teachers can learn to interact with children using open-ended questions. This interactive workshop will focus on specific strategies for asking open-ended questions to develop children's thinking and creativity.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation instrument developed to assess classroom quality in preschool through third-grade classrooms. The CLASS assesses quality around three domains ---Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support--- and ten dimensions that are based solely on interactions between teachers and children in classrooms.

Emotional Support

Positive Climate: In classrooms with a strong positive climate, teachers and children are enthusiastic about learning and respectful of one another. Teachers and children develop warm, supportive relationships with each other and clearly enjoy being together and spending time in the classroom. Their interactions provide children with a secure base for learning and exploration of academic and social skills.

The elements of *Positive Climate* are:

- **Relationships:** physical proximity, shared activities, peer assistance, matched affect, social conversation
- **Positive Affect:** smiling, laughter, enthusiasm
- **Positive Communication:** verbal affection, physical affection, positive expectations
- **Respect:** eye contact, warm calm voice, respectful language

Negative Climate: Negative climate refers to the level of expressed negativity such as anger, hostility, or aggression shown by teachers or children. Teachers and children appear angry or irritated and make sarcastic or disrespectful comments.

The elements of *Negative Climate* are:

- **Negative Affect:** irritability, anger, harsh voice, peer aggression, disconnected or escalating negativity
- **Punitive Control:** yelling, threats, physical control, harsh punishment
- **Sarcasm/Disrespect:** sarcastic voice/statement, teasing, humiliation
- **Severe Negativity:** victimization, bullying, physical punishment

Teacher Sensitivity: Teachers are sensitive when they consistently, quickly, and effectively respond to individual children based on verbal or behavioral cues.

The elements of *Teacher Sensitivity* are:

- **Awareness:** anticipates problems and plans appropriately, notices lack of understanding and/or difficulties
- **Responsiveness:** acknowledges emotions, provides comfort and assistance, provides individualized support
- **Addresses Problems:** helps in an effective and timely manner, helps resolve problems
- **Student Comfort:** seeks support and guidance, freely participates, takes risks

Regard for Student Perspectives: Teachers intentionally place an emphasis on children's interests, motivations, and points of view. Teachers promote children's independence by providing meaningful roles for them within the classroom, encouraging them to talk, listening to their ideas, and allowing them to make decisions for themselves when appropriate. The elements of *Regard for Student Perspectives* are:

- **Flexibility and Student Focus:** shows flexibility, incorporates students' ideas
- **Support for Autonomy and Leadership:** allows choice, allows students to lead sessions, gives students responsibilities
- **Student Expression:** encourages student talk, elicits ideas and/or perspectives
- **Restriction of Movement:** allows movement, is not rigid

Classroom Organization

Behavior Management: Rules and expectations are clearly and consistently communicated. Behavior management works best when focused on proactive intervention and redirection of minor misbehaviors. The elements of *Behavior Management* are:

- **Clear Behavior Expectations:** clear expectations, consistency, clarity of rules
- **Proactive:** anticipates problem behaviors or escalation
- **Redirection of Misbehavior:** effective reduction of misbehavior, attention to the positive, uses subtle cues to redirect, efficient redirection
- **Student Behavior:** frequent compliance, little aggression and defiance

Productivity:

Productive classrooms consist of clearly defined learning activities that are consistently provided for children throughout the day. The classroom feels like a well-oiled machine where everyone knows what is expected of them and how to go about doing it. The elements of *Productivity* are:

- **Maximizing Learning Time:** provision of activities, choice when finished, few disruptions, effective completion of managerial tasks, pacing
- **Routines:** students know what to do, clear instructions, little wandering
- **Transitions:** brief, explicit follow-through, learning opportunities within
- **Preparation:** materials ready and accessible, knows lessons

Instructional Learning Formats: Teachers maximize children's interest, engagement, and ability to learn from activities. The elements of *Instructional Learning Formats* are:

- **Effective Facilitation:** teacher involvement, effective questioning, expanding children's involvement
- **Variety of Modalities and Materials:** range of auditory, visual, and movement opportunities; interesting and creative materials; hands-on opportunities
- **Student Interest:** active participation, listening, focused attention

- **Clarity of Learning Objectives:** advanced organizers, summaries, reorientation statements

Instructional Support

Concept Development: Rather than concentrating solely on rote instruction and recall of facts, teachers facilitate children's broader understanding of concepts and ideas. Children are provided opportunities to use analysis and reasoning in their approach to problems, to be creative and generate their own ideas and products, and to understand their world through experimentation and brainstorming. The elements of *Concept Development* are:

- **Analysis and Reasoning:** why and/or how questions, problem solving, prediction/experimentation, classification/comparison, evaluation
- **Creating:** brainstorming, planning, producing
- **Integration:** connect concepts, integrates with previous knowledge
- **Connections to the Real World:** real-world applications, related to students' lives

Quality of Feedback: Children learn the most when they are consistently given feedback that expands their knowledge or builds on their performance of a task. Feedback works best when it helps children to refine their knowledge and gets them to understand how they came up with their ideas, rather than simply focusing on getting the right answer. Effective feedback provides children with specific, expansive information, related to their work, that helps them reach a deeper understanding of concepts than they could get on their own. The elements of *Quality of Feedback* are:

- **Scaffolding:** hints, assistance
- **Feedback Loops:** back-and-forth exchanges, persistence by teacher, follow-up questions
- **Prompting Thought Processes:** asks students to explain thinking, queries responses and actions
- **Providing Information:** expansion, clarification, specific feedback
- **Encouragement and Affirmation:** recognition, reinforcement, student persistence

Language Modeling: Strong language modeling consists of engagement in meaningful conversations between teachers and children. Teachers repeat children's words in more complex forms and ask follow-up questions. Children are consistently exposed to a variety of language uses and forms, such as requesting, rejecting, commenting, conversing, predicting, and affirming. The elements of *Language Modeling* are:

- **Frequent Conversations:** back-and-forth exchanges, contingent responding, peer conversations
- **Open-ended Questions:** questions require more than a one-word response, students respond
- **Repetition and Extension:** repeats, extends/elaborates
- **Self Talk and Parallel Talk:** maps own actions with language, maps student action with language
- **Advanced Language:** variety of words, connected to familiar words and/or ideas

Pre-K Class Dimensions Guide (2010), Charlottesville, VA: Teachstone, Inc.

Pianta, Robert C., La Paro, Karen M., and Hamre, Bridget K. (2008) Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS) manual, pre-k. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. www.classobservation.com

Open-ended Questions

Questions that have more than one right answer, or ones than can be answered in many ways, are called open-ended or divergent questions. This way of asking questions stimulates more language use, acknowledges that there can be many solutions to one problem, affirms children's ideas, and encourages creative thinking.

Open-ended questions open up conversations. When you ask an open-ended question, you don't know what the child's answer is going to be. Close-ended questions usually limit conversation to a one or two word response, and sometimes they end the conversation. Examples:

Close-ended question: "What color is this?"

Open-ended question: "You used a lot of blue on your painting. What does it remind you of?"

Close-ended question: "How many teddy bears are on the block?"

Open-ended question: "What are those teddy bears thinking about?"

Close-ended question: "What's your doll's name?"

Open-ended question: "Your baby is so beautiful! Tell me about her."

Children must have a high level of verbal skills to respond to open-ended questions. Because open-ended questions have a wide-range of possible answers, children are able to respond only if they have a fairly high level of verbal skills, vocabulary, and self-confidence. If the child has limited verbal skills, use parallel talk, repetition, extension, or ask a close-ended question.

The success of open-ended questions depends on the adult's ability to understand the child's interest or focus. The adult may be used to asking questions aimed at assessing how much a child knows (about color, number, shape or alphabet) and may find it difficult at first to ask engaging questions with no right answer. Close-ended questions usually end conversations. Open-ended questions that are too general or unfocused may be difficult for the child to respond to and may also end the conversation.

A child has been using fingerpaint on the art table, mixing together orange, blue, and yellow. A teacher approaches.

Close-ended question: Teacher: "What colors are you using?"

Child: "Orange."

General open-ended question: Teacher: "Tell me about what you are doing."

Child: "Mixing colors."

Targeted open-ended question: Teacher: "Wow! How did you get this color? What did you do first?"

Child: "First I stuck my hand in the blue paint, then I stuck my other hand in the orange paint. I made the paint squeeze through my fingers. It felt yucky. Then it started changing colors!"

Open-ended questions that are challenging can develop children's thinking skills : Challenging children by posing thought-provoking, open-ended questions that are rich and clear can stimulate and push at the edges of children's development. These questions are often expressed in conditional form "What will happen if you...?" Types of open-ended questions that are challenging include:

- Making predictions - *What do you think will happen if you keep adding blocks to your tower?*
- Stretching thinking - *What would happen if there were no cars, trucks, buses, planes, or boats? How would we get around?*
- Considering consequences - *What would happen if you left your drawing outside and it rained?*
- Assessing feelings - *How would you feel if that happened to you? How do you think Juan feels?*
- Thinking about similarities and differences - *How are these two blocks the same? What makes these things go together?*
- Applying knowledge to solve a problem - *What could you do to keep the paint from dripping on the floor?*
- Evaluating - *What made you decide to pick this book to read? How did this make you feel?*

For Dual Language Learners: Ask open-ended questions in the child's home language. This will help the child develop her cognitive skills and her home language skills. When using the child's second language, open-ended questions may be very difficult to understand and answer if the child is at a beginning level of language development. Close-ended questions, in contrast, provide limited vocabulary and simple choices that are easier for beginning English language learners to understand. As the child acquires language, the adult can gradually ask more complex close-ended questions and eventually move on to asking open-ended questions. "It helps if teachers use 'yes/no' questions with beginning English language learners, because these questions are easier than 'what' questions, and 'what' questions are easier than 'where' or 'when' questions. 'How' and 'why' questions are the most difficult for new speakers of the language." McLaughlin, Barry "Fostering Second Language Development in Young Children: Principles and Practices, National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, 1995. www.ncela.gwu.edu/miscpubs/ncredsll/epr14.htm

"Never ask a child a question that you already know the answer to."

David Weikart, former president, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

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Types of Questions

Information Questions: Children obtain information on the topic at hand.

What is ...?
What are...?
How are these the same?
How are they different?

Explanation Questions:

Children ask or respond to “How...” and “Why...” questions to develop reasoning skills and explanations.

Why...?
How..?

Philosophical Questions

Children ask or respond to questions that relate to the child’s personal experiences to a larger context.

What do you think of....?
What doesmean?
What does...have to do with me?

Discussion Questions

Children learn about and discuss different perspectives and responses to problems or issues.

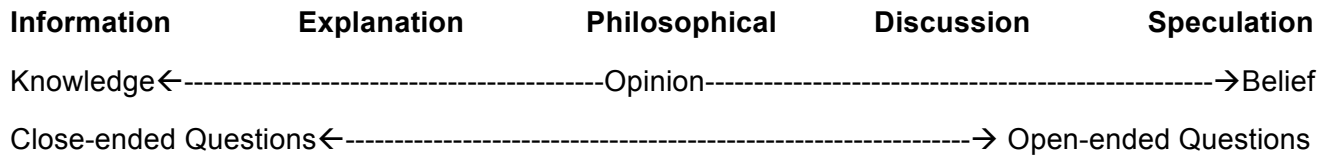
What do you think of...?
How could...?
What do others think of ...?

Speculation Questions

Children ask and respond to questions to develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

What if...?
What would happen if...?

Types of Questions



| Type of question | What are the possible questions? | Where can children find answers to this type of question? |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Information questions | <i>What is ...?</i> <i>How are these the same?</i> <i>How are they different?</i> | - from visiting experts - from books - through direct investigation |
| Explanation questions | <i>Why...?</i> <i>How...?</i> | - through direct investigation by relating and combining pieces of information - from visiting experts - from information learned on field studies |
| Philosophical questions | <i>What doesmean?</i> <i>What does ... have to do with me?</i> | - from visiting experts - from interviews with parents, older children, visiting experts - by relating ideas to personal experiences and context. |
| Discussion questions | <i>What do you think of...?</i> <i>What do others think of ...?</i> | - by interviewing people with different perspectives (parents, older children, community members) |
| Speculation questions | <i>What if...?</i> <i>What would happen if...?</i> | - through creative thinking, imaginative deduction, empathetic thought. |

Open-ended Question Starters

Tell me about...

How do you know that...?

What do you think...?

Show me how you...

I wonder why...

Can you tell me more about why...

How did you...

Why did you...

How do you know?

What did you do first?

What can you tell me about...

Can you think of another way...

What do you think?

What do you think would happen if...

What could you do instead?

How did you do that?

What does it remind you of?

What can you do next time?

Tell me what happened.

What do you call the things you're using?

How are you going to do that?

Is there anything else you could use?

What is it made of?

What do you think will happen next?

What could be added?

What else can this be used for?

What else is like this?

How can you do it faster?