How-to

Utilize higher-order questioning tools to guide rich classroom conversations

With so many concepts and an ever-expanding curriculum to teach, it is easy to see how educators often become the primary voice in classroom discussions. Incorporating certain concrete tools into the classroom community can strengthen the students’ voices and improve their questioning skills.

Step 1: Use higher-order thinking posters and charts to reinforce ideas and develop common student language.
Introduce each thinking level from Bloom’s Taxonomy. Ask students to define each in their own words, give examples and become familiar with terms (this is an ongoing process). Gather materials to create a color-coded poster of terms for each level. Assign a different color to each level, such as green for Remembering and yellow for Understanding. Display the poster at eye level so students can read, point and affix sticky notes whenever they need.

Use these visual reminders to practice linking thinking words, core concepts and academic skills to big ideas and essential questions across the curriculum. Creating a common thinking vocabulary and identifying questions to build thinking skills enables all students to learn at their own level and progress toward using and understanding higher-order thinking skills.

Step 2: Begin by scaffolding student questioning with sentence stems.
Provide strategic integration of higher-order thinking skills by bringing sentence stems into the classroom for all students to learn and use. Building from the classroom set of thinking posters, work with students to create questions. Determine how to sort and classify stems. Hang the posters at student level so they can be used as writing/thinking/discussion/reflection tools.

The following are some examples of stems:
• **Remember**: What is...? Can you describe...? How is...? How can you add to your description...? Why did...? What happened...?

• **Understand**: Can you explain why...? What was most important...? Can you clarify...? What is meant by...? What is the best answer...? Why? How could you summarize...?

• **Apply**: What could happen next...? How would you solve...? What facts would you choose to explain? What approach would you use? What is another way you can organize/plan...?
Bridging the Gap: Teaching Students Who Fall Far Below or Far Above Grade Level

Analyze: What was the problem/challenge/difficulty with...? What can you predict/infer/conclude...? What is the relationship between...? What evidence can you find that...? How would you classify...? How would you categorize...?

Evaluate: What are the consequences of...? How can you judge...? What do you believe about it and why? What evidence is most important to your view about...?

Create: What is your opinion about...? What do you imagine...? How would you change it to make it better? What is another possible solution? How could you build/construct/design...?

Sentence stems are essential tools for all students to use throughout the day and within every subject to support their learning and extend their thinking.

Step 3: Create a set of Q cards.
Q cards are critical to developing more options for cross-curricular, ongoing instructional differentiation. Use them to drive open-ended student thinking throughout the school day and provide opportunities for all learners to be more successful.

Using index cards, poster paper or presentation slides, create a series of question cards, or as students will come to call them, Q cards.

Once the cards are created, randomly select three or four Qs to ask and answer during Morning Meeting or whole class discussion time. Choose a few cards to use during guided reading groups or literature circles. Use Q cards to create a framework for nonfiction research or to start the script for an interview students will complete at school or at home. Q cards can be employed during journaling time or hands-on projects to extend the thought processes.

One quick Q card activity that can be integrated into conference time or during small group instruction is 2 4 Me/1 4 U.
1. Q cards (6–12) are laid face down in the center of the student group (differentiate the number of cards based on the students’ levels).

2. Student A turns over three cards. Student A then decides which two cards to answer and passes the final card to Student B.

3. Student A creates a question or answer based on the two Q cards he or she turned over, and then Student B answers the Q card that was passed to him or her.
4. Following a quick discussion, Student B then selects three cards, answers two and passes one.

New cards can be replenished as needed. Q cards can be targeted to certain thinking skills, or they can be randomly stacked. The quality of the questions, connections and thinking grows stronger and stronger as this activity is learned and practiced.