

The results of a number of studies on questioning behavior of reading teachers (such as Wolf and others, 1967) indicate the need for supervisors to help teachers improve both the quality of the questions they use and their questioning techniques. Although their objectives may be analysis and interpretation, teachers typically ask questions aimed at recall rather than critical thinking. Most teacher questions are followed by a single student response. This type of questioning is reinforced by the teachers' manuals that accompany basal readers (Habecker, 1977).

Improved questioning is essential to improved teaching because it is a fundamental teaching skill. Questioning is an "alterable variable" (Bloom, 1980)—a quality of teaching open to alteration through study, practice, and feedback; not a static or innate characteristic of teachers.

Supervisors can use the following guidelines based on current research to help teachers of reading improve student comprehension and at the same time motivate students to interpret and analyze the material they read. Supervisors should stress that these are not rules; they are guidelines to be used flexibly and sensibly.

A. Selecting the Student to Respond

1. Use a predictable pattern of questioning that lets students know when they will be called on to respond and ensures that every student has an equal opportunity to participate orally in the lesson. This is particularly helpful to reticent students and puts bolder ones on notice that everyone is expected to take part (Anderson and others, 1978).

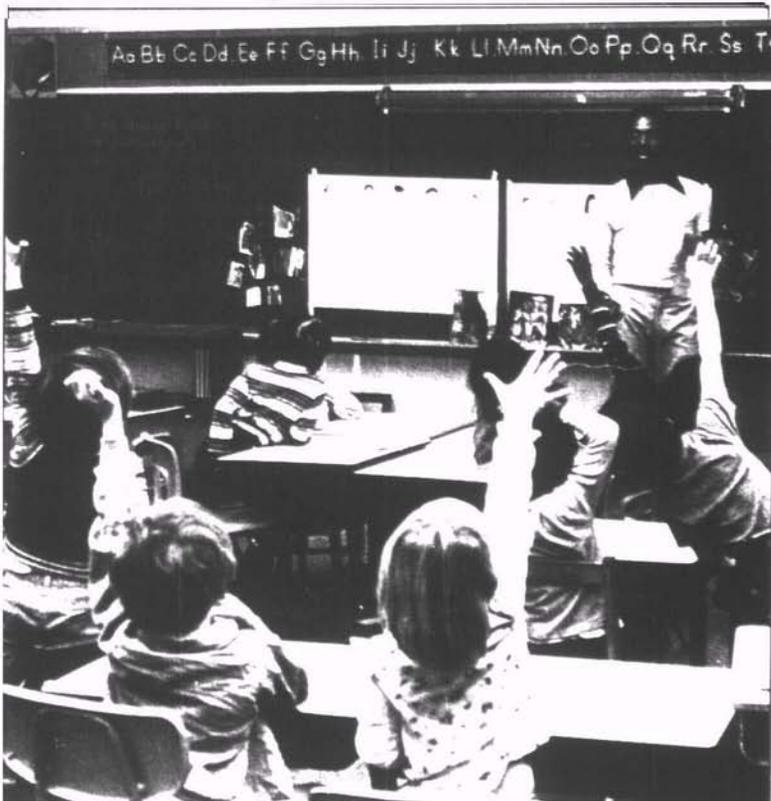
2. Discourage students from calling out an answer; make it clear that everyone, in turn, will have a chance to respond (Anderson and others, 1978).

3. Call the student's name and then ask the question so as to ensure that all students will know who is to respond (Program on Teacher Effectiveness, 1976).

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Questioning for Improved Reading

Students will improve in reading comprehension if teachers learn to ask better questions.



4. Occasionally break the pattern you've been using and call on students about their reactions to another student's response (Anderson and others, 1978).

5. Call on volunteers no more than 10 to 15 percent of the time during question-and-answer sessions (Program on Teacher Effectiveness, 1976).

6. Call on volunteers mainly in those parts of the lesson when students offer their personal opinions or experiences (Anderson and others, 1978).

B. Phrasing the Question

7. When checking for comprehension, ask reading-dependent questions. That is, ask questions students can answer from information in the reading material rather than from prior knowledge. If the students figure out that your questions do not actually tap their reading comprehension, they will be less motivated to read the material (Tuinman, 1971).

8. Ask clear, concise questions. For example, do not ask "Why was Franklin Roosevelt elected President?" which could produce the perfectly legitimate answer, "Because he got the most electoral votes." Ask instead, "What did the article say were some of the reasons people voted for Franklin Roosevelt?" Give some clues in your question to indicate that you want specific examples. You could ask, "What issues in Roosevelt's platform appealed to labor unions?"

9. Minimize the use of leading questions, rhetorical questions, and directions phrased as a question. That is, ask only those questions to which you want the students to respond on their own. For example, avoid questions like "Don't you think Kitty was the one who deserved the medal at the county fair?" and "Now, why don't we all turn to the end of the story?" (Anderson and others, 1978).

C. Expecting a Response

10. Ask a question and wait for the response. Do not answer your own question or request a second student to answer it. Research shows that students who are given three to five seconds to respond increase the



length and number of their responses, change their cognitive processes to more complex ones, and begin to ask more questions. In short, ask one question at a time and, by waiting, express your expectation to receive a response and your willingness to listen to it (Rowe, 1978).

11. When you work with less academically oriented students, try to get a response from a student you have questioned even if it means rephrasing the question, adding clues, or asking another question. Encourage the student who was silent, or who answered "I don't know," or who answered incorrectly to contribute in some way, however minor or brief it may appear at the time.

For example, suppose that you have asked, "Why was winning the prize at the 4-H fair so important to Mary (according to the story)?" If a slow student doesn't answer after five seconds, then you might begin your follow-up by offering some clues; for instance, "If you recall, Mary wanted to buy another goat, Nanny, to mate with Billy. What do you remember about how much Nanny would cost?" With such a

clue, a previously silent student may begin to talk about the story (Program on Teacher Effectiveness, 1976).

12. When you work with academically oriented students, on the other hand, try to elicit a complete, correct response if there is one (Program on Teacher Effectiveness, 1976).

Supervisors should also help teachers develop strategies for questioning. Single questions are often appropriate, but when questions follow a particular sequence, there is a cumulative effect. "The impact of teaching lies not alone in its single acts but in the manner in which these acts are combined into a pattern" (Taba, 1964, p. 15).

A strategy provides a framework within which to determine the questions to ask. Because the strategy includes different types of questions, students are required to perform many cognitive tasks in making their responses, which contributes to their cognitive development. Figure 1 is an example of a strategy for questioning students about a work of fiction. In the left column are questions the teacher asks; in the right column

are the cognitive tasks the student performs in responding.

Supervisors should also stimulate teachers to encourage students to ask their own questions. Research shows that, once alert to the need for student questions, teachers can succeed in increasing their frequency. Singer urges what he calls "active comprehension." He points out that when children formulate their own questions to guide their thinking, they have a stake in the responses, develop a positive attitude toward reading, and "become independent in the process of reading and learning from text" (Singer, 1978). Other researchers agree that when children ask each other questions and answer them, comprehension is better than when they respond only to the teacher's questions (Ortiz, 1977; Schwartz and Sheff, 1975).

In short, the task of the supervisor is to help the reading teacher learn and use tactics and strategies for improved questioning of students. (For additional strategies and commentary on questioning see Hyman, 1979). By asking questions strategically and by developing students' desire and

ability to ask their own questions, teachers can demonstrate concern for their students, for the material read, and for the important skill of reading. ■

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Figure 1. Questioning Strategy for a Work of Fiction.

| Questioner | Respondent |
|--|---|
| 1. Who are the main characters and what are the main events of this story (book)? | 1. Identifies and describes the central features. |
| 2. What are the connections between the main characters, events, location, and time of this story? | 2. Relates the central features to each other. |
| 3. In what ways did the main characters change during the story? | 3. Identifies movement in the story. |
| 4. How did these changes affect the other characters and the events in the story? | 4. Analyzes the effects of change on other elements in the story. |
| 5. Were you expecting the story to end as it did? If yes, how did the author prepare you for the ending? If no, how did the author surprise you? | 5. Compares the expected ending to the author's ending. |
| 6. How did the author create and maintain your interest in the story? | 6. Analyzes the elements of style that characterize the author in this story. |
| 7. How are the elements (events, people, and setting) of this story similar to elements in your own life? How are they different? | 7. Relates the story to his or her own life. |
| 8. In what ways is this story like " (title) " or some other story you have read? | 8. Compares this story to another story. |
| 9. What is your favorite short passage from the book? Tell what qualities it has. | 9. Identifies and comments on a passage that is liked. |
| 10. What do you conclude about this story in light of the points you've made already? | 10. Synthesizes the many points raised and draws a conclusion. |

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