Exploring Classroom Interaction through the Whys, Hows and Whats of Self Questioning

Dr Stephen J Hall

Director Language
Sunway University College Malaysia
Outline

- Learning opportunities and questions –why?
- A practitioner’s typology of questions –what?
- Questions in action in the classroom –how?
- Self questions for reflection
“When then” proposed Socrates “if you should ever be charged in actual fact with the upbringing and education of these imaginary children of yours...so you will make a law that they must devote themselves especially to the technique of asking and answering questions.” (Republic VII:534)
Learning Opportunities

- **Learning is not teaching** (Allwright 2005)

- **Learners uptake is more than what is explicitly taught** (Slimani 1987)

- Learners and teachers co-construct lessons

- Do we provide questioning opportunities for learning for learners and ourselves?

- Discuss with your partner
A practitioners typology of questions 1

- Indirect questions – not true questions syntactically but functionally e.g. I don’t know where Jack is.
- Direct questions – closed or open
  - Closed – specified alternative. Did you A or B?
  - Yes/no– Initial auxiliary verb : Have you learnt the phrase?
  - Tag type: wasn’t it?
  - Intonated declaratives: Somebody is with her?
A practitioner’s typology of questions 2

- Closed or open questions (Barnes 1969)
- Echoic – mechanical response, form focused
- Epistemic – focus on what student knows—inductive or deductive, more syntactically complex answer
- Expressive – wants to express – individual emotion or opinion

A system based on anticipated response
Interactive question – reflective task 1

- Write a teaching question which you remember using recently?
- What was the purpose of the question?
- What would you do with the response?
- How would you simplify the question?
- How would you extend the learning/knowledge gained?
A form–based open question typology

- *Wh* questions link to grammar awareness
- *Who* to the actor
- *When* to specifying time specifics
- *How* to broad range reasoning
- *Why* to divergent evaluative higher reasoning

- Do we make this awareness explicit to our students?
Elicit   Repeat – What did I say just now?
Elicit   Confirm– Is everyone clear on the meaning of terminal boredom?
Elicit   Agree – Ali is going to the market, right?
Elicit   Inform – What do you know about “photo synthesis”?
Typology generalizations

- The shorter the response the less burden in the answer – for us and learners
- The closer, temporal and spatial, to the presentation of the language being questioned the less risk in answering
Typology 2 – performance factors

- The less output the less learning there is e.g. Yes / No questions (Hall, 1991)
- Asking for info is challenging
- A public performance response is seen as risky
- Some questions may be directives (Tsui, 2003)
Reflective task 2

- Aligning learner empowerment with questions
- How do I provide for learner questions in my classroom?
- How do I provide a sense of safety for question asking?
- How do I link awareness of questions to examination skills?
Echoic questions of teachers, learners and communication

- Comprehension – All right?
- Clarification – What do you mean? May be form (grammar, phonics, spelling)
- or meaning based (content, context, function)
- Confirmation checks – Did you mean?

*Used everyday in conversation repair*
Epistemic questions of teachers, learners and communication

- Display – an overused device e.g. What’s the opposite of cold?
- Rhetorical – linked to presentation speaking e.g. Why didn't I do such a thing. Because I...
- Referential – refers outside text input e.g. Why didn’t you do your project?/ What did you do on Sunday?

The wider the reference field, the larger the cognitive load, the more diverse the response and so it is with our professional reflection
Questions for us on our questions

- How many questions did I ask?
- How many questions were form-based?
- How many were yes/no questions?
- How many are display questions? (Farrell, 2004)
Questions for us on our questions

- What tasks did I lead that provided for questions that were oral or written?
- What task arrangements did I use over a week which provide for learner to learner questions?
- How long is my wait time? (Cazden, 1988)
- How do I react to a question which is an unexpected learning opportunity? (Allwright, 2005)
Reflective questions

- The scribbled note in the lesson question??
- What worked in the lesson?
- What did not motivate the learners? – language, ideas, skills, text or support media

Questions from learner reflection:
- Today I learnt, I felt, I thought of, I wanted to ask the teacher about........

- What professional development questions do I have and how will I answer them?
Thank you for sharing

Dr Stephen J Hall

Director Language
Sunway University College
Malaysia

with the support of Master Travel

www.stephenjhall.com