



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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SOME CAUTIONS ON QUESTIONING

Questioning can be a tricky process. There are many pitfalls to avoid. Here is a brief compilation of some of them:

MULTIPLE OR OVERLAID QUESTIONS:

Example: "What did the mayor tell his commissioners, and what is your opinion of his proposals?"

Criticism: Students become confused when two questions are grouped together in a single sentence

Suggestions: Ask one question at a time. (What advice did the mayor give his commissioners? and what is your opinion of his advice?)

THE VAGUE OR AMBIGUOUS QUESTIONS:

Example: "What do you think about encyclopedias?"

Irrelevant response can be made because it is open to different interpretations. A better question might be. "What types of information can be found in encyclopedias that will not be found in your textbooks?"

THE LEADING QUESTION:

Example: "Why was Kennedy a great president?"

A student might promptly agree with the teacher without thinking about his/her response.

The following would prompt this: "Why do some Americans consider John F. Kennedy to have been a good president?" The question encourages students to think through the reasons that determine opinions. To insure a fair presentation of an issue, the teacher might use the following thought process:

- Why did its critics call it a....?
- How did its supporters answer the charge?, and. What are the facts?, and Why the differences of opinion?

HANDLING STUDENT RESPONSES

Related to the art of effective questioning is the skill with which the teacher accepts correct student responses. Some general guidelines to follow:

- Encouraging students to comment on each other's responses, i.e.. "Do you agree with Martin's explanation?", "How would you correct Helen's answer?"
- Underscoring important responses. Recording them in the form of a board summary or asking other students to rephrase them are ways of accomplishing this.
- Refraining from repeating students' responses encourages students to address their responses to the class, rather than to the teacher.
- Redirecting individual student's response for consideration by the whole class, e.g.. "That's one very good reason. What other reasons can we find?"
- Rather than always praising a student's answer by saying, "Good." use such phrases as:
 - o "That was an interesting point."
 - o "This comment is so important that it deserves further discussion."
 - o "Your comment shows great understanding."
 - o "Why was John's answer good?"

HANDLING INCORRECT RESPONSES

The teacher should also be prepared to handle incorrect responses. Here are some guidelines:

- The teacher could say, "Your statement is not completely correct," and then call on another student for the correct response.
- A good procedure in handling an incomplete or incorrect answer is to tell the student that you will return to him/her later, i.e.. "Listen to the correct answer, and I will return to you later for your comments."
- Incorrect statements can also be handled by using the following strategies:
 - o "That was a good try - but you didn't hit the point." "Who can help?"
 - o "You're a little off-track." "Who can help Sandra?"
- Ask, "Please explain how you arrived at that answer?" Using this approach from time to time can give you some insights into how students arrive at the answers they give