



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Cues and Questions

from Classroom Instruction that Works
by Robert Marzano, et al.

Cues and questions are ways that a classroom teacher helps students use what they already know about a topic. Although the two are similar, cues involve “hints” about what students are about to experience. Questions elicit from the students what they already know about the topic about to be covered. Both are at the heart of classroom practice, accounting for up to 80 percent of what occurs in a given classroom on a given day.

The following generalizations can guide teachers in using cues and questions.

1. **Cues and questions should focus on what is important as opposed to what is unusual.** Rather than appealing to students’ interests by bringing up what is unusual, teachers should realize that the more students know about a topic, the more they tend to be interested in it. Hence, questions designed to help student obtain a deeper understanding of content will eventually increase their interest in the topic.
2. **“Higher-level” questions produce deeper learning than “lower-level” questions.** Research indicates that questions that require students to analyze information produce more learning than questions that simply require students to recall or recognize information. Unfortunately, most of the questions teachers ask are lower order in nature. Higher-level questions require students to restructure information or apply knowledge in some way.
3. **“Waiting” briefly before accepting responses from students has the effect of increasing the depth of students’**

answers. Pausing several seconds after asking a question to give students time to think before being called upon to answer is an effective strategy. It encourages more student discourse and more student-to-student interaction.

4. **Questions are effective learning tools even when asked before a learning experience.** Often teachers ask questions after students have read a text or completed an activity. Asking questions before a learning experience establishes a “mental set” with which students process the learning experience. Again, higher-level questions tend to produce deeper levels of learning.

Classroom Practice

Cues are straightforward ways of activating prior knowledge. Using cues, teachers can provide students with a preview of what they are about to experience.

The following example shows the use of cues in an elementary Spanish class.

Sra. Nina starts her first-year Spanish class by asking if anyone has a friends who is known for borrowing things. Those people, she says, are called “pediguenos” in Spanish, or “leeches” in English. Sra. Nina then explains:

“We dedicate our lesson today to the *pediguenos* because we are going to learn how to use possessive adhectives, or *adjetivos posesivos*. We will learn and practice the possessive adjectives for you, *tu, el, ella, Ud., nosotros, vosotros, ellos, ellas, y Uds*. For example, Peter doesn’t use his own car; her borrows his friend’s car. Now, let’s say it in Spanish.”

How do you use cues in your own subject area?