

How might we improve the way we handle students' responses to our questions?

Research evidence

Whether the questions teachers ask prompt a discussion and /or extended answers depends on the teacher's intention when asking the questions. For example, asking an open question whilst anticipating a specific response can actually make the question a closed one, as in this example:

Teacher: what is snow lighter than? Snow is falling through the air very lightly. What does it make you think of? [She indicated with her hands that she meant weight].

Your evidence

You might like to explore how you handle students' responses in question and answer sessions. You could agree to work with a colleague and take turns to observe one another during a question and answer session. You could note down where the teacher:

- invited a student to expand on his/her original answer and/or other students to respond to an initial answer given by a student
- probed students' reasoning
- encouraged students to put mistakes right together through discussion
- gave an evaluative comment (e.g. Yes, that's right!')
- prompted any students to give a particular answer through body language etc
- ignored any students' responses, and
- paused before responding

You could explore with each other why you handled the students' responses in the ways you did and discuss the effects the different approaches had on the students. You might also like to discuss how else you might have handled your students' responses.

Next steps

Now that you are more aware of your usual approach, you might like to experiment with different ways of responding so that you probe students' reasoning, uncover misconceptions and open up their ideas to discussion by the class. For example, if you find you usually respond straight away, you might like to see what happens if you pause before offering a response. What happens to the subsequent discussion if you prompt students to "Go on ..." or ask others to say what they think about an answer? What do your students' various responses tell you about their individual levels of understanding? Could you use what you discover to plan follow up tasks and activities?

Find out more

- Participation anthology RfT Section 2, page 5
- RfT Effective talk in the primary classroom
- RfT Interactive teaching and interactive whiteboards
- RfT Assessment for learning: putting it into practice