

## Teacher Questioning Tips: Effective Techniques for Mediating Dialogic Talk

**T**o enhance the approach and mitigate some potential pitfalls in discussion or dialogic talk following use of a prompt and student observations, consider the following tips:

**E**nsure a non-threatening learning environment. If students do not feel it is safe to contribute to a conversation, they usually won't. As well, remember that there is a difference between forced dialogue and real dialogue, between challenge and disdain or ridicule, and between rigid "turn-taking" and allowing others to speak.



**H**elp students to look for discrepant events in the eliciting prompt, contradictions between what is observed and what was anticipated, and possible reasons. These types of observations and ponderings naturally lead to further investigations. Also, try recording these particularly contradictory observations on the blackboard, flipchart, or transparency. Students will challenge a written statement more often than one that is just spoken aloud.

**R**edirect off-topic or displaced talk toward "how" and "what if" questions, and direct students' discussion towards each other rather than you. Seek to enable student-student verbal interaction. Arrange student seating to accentuate this interaction.

**M**odel question-asking by prompting students to explain their observations and their perceptions of why they saw what they did (e.g., "Why do you think that happened?", "I wonder what would happen if...?", "How would you explain that to your friends so that it made sense?", etc.).

**K**eep a log or notes of the discussion, and work together with students to synthesize the class discussion, explicitly using their contributions, and stopping to clarify those whose meanings are more difficult to interpret. Model techniques for organizing students' comments and suggestions (e.g., categorizing similar responses, eliminating redundancy, and so forth). Not only does this help students acquire these skills, but it greatly increases the new ideas, questions

and learning they take from the discussion, and helps to target further investigations as appropriate.



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