<u>Questions in Teaching, Training and Learning</u>

*"Let us make the study of the art of question-asking one of the central disciplines in language education." (*Postman 1979)

I. Some questions for you

1. Who asks most of the questions in your lessons/training sessions?
2. To how many of your own questions do you already know the answer?
3. How do you "receive" your students'/participants' answers?
4. What kinds of questions do your students/participants ask in class?
5. How do you react if you don't know the answer to a question put by a student/participant?
6. What is the relationship between the following in your teaching/training:
   a) questions and knowledge?
   b) questions and authority/discipline?
   c) questions and thinking?

II. Categorising questions

1. In groups of 2/3, select a range of questions from your own practice or from teaching/training materials.
2. Devise at least three ways of categorising these questions, and explain your rationale for each.
3. Compare your categorisation with the following taxonomy of thinking skills (based on Bloom & Kratwohl, 1965). Try redistributing your questions to these categories.

LOWER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

1. Knowledge-focussed

2. Comprehension-focussed

3. Application-focussed

HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

1. Analysis

2. Synthesis

3. Evaluation

III.Follow-up Tasks

1. Using a text or topic as a starting point, construct a sequence of questions to use with a specified target group of trainees. Take account of one or more of the categorisations you have just devised.
2. Devise an activity or a sequence of activities to raise awareness of the importance of classroom questions in training course participants.
3. Make your own notes on the connection between questions and thinking skills.

IV. General Questioning Skills in Teaching and Training (adapted from Kerry, 1992)

- pitching language and content at the right level (according to age, experience, maturity etc)
- distributing questions around the class
- prompting and giving clues
- encouraging and praising students' answers
- reformulating and affirming learners' responses
- allowing silences
- sequencing questions ('closed' to 'open'; 'lower order' to 'higher order')
- using all responses (even 'wrong' answers) in a positive way.

V. Improving your Questioning Skills: Some Hints (after van Ments, 1990)

DO…	DON'T…
…ask questions clearly and simply	…ask 'multiple' questions
…ask lower order questions to check learning	…stop at that point!
…probe and encourage further thinking	…accept all responses at face value
…allow your students' answers to lead to more questions	…always insist on closure after a question has been answered
…ask your questions openly	…ask 'loaded' questions which may trap or threaten learners
…allow time for thinking and answering	…shoot questions like bullets
	…be afraid of silence
…allow your students' answers to shape your own thinking	…insist that your students follow your agenda in their answers
…listen to and affirm your students' answers	…hog the talking time
…ask fewer, better questions	…ask a lot of 'low quality' questions
…encourage your students to be questioners	…monopolise the role of questioner

VI. Further Reading

Bloom, B.S. & D.R. Kratwohl (1965)   *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain*   New York: D. McKay
Brown, G. & E.C. Wragg (1993)   *Questioning*   London: Routledge
Dillon, J.T. (1988)   *Questioning and Teaching*   London: Croom Helm
Kerry, T. (1992) *Effective Questioning*   London: Macmillan
Morgan, J. & M. Rinvolucri (1988)   *The Q Book*   Harlow: Longman
Postman, N. (1979)   *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* New York: Laurel Press
Saxton, J. (1991)   *Teaching, Questioning and Learning* London: Routledge
Van Ments, M. (1990)   *Active Talk* London: Kogan Page

> *"There are more questions than answers,*
> *And the more I find out, the less I know"*
> (Johnny Nash, reggae song)

Comment I have been using versions of this activity with groups of teachers or trainers for a few years now, most recently with a group in Tashkent. I find that I need a text or a context to clarify Bloom's categories at Stage II, and participants need quite a bit of support with the task at Stage III. It gets a bit prescriptive at Stage V but participants seem to appreciate this as a kind of summary. It is still very much 'work in progress' and any suggestions for improvement would be very welcome.

Rod, November 2006