Welcome to issue two of Transforming Teaching.

As promised we follow up last issue’s discussion of general questioning technique with some examples of games you might try to ‘spice up’ your Q&A sessions.

**Questioning games**

**Snowballing**

This technique is a good way of promoting debate and active listening. It is especially well suited to broad or subjective questions or problem solving.

Start with an open question and then ask a named student to respond to whoever answered. Then nominate another learner for a further response and so on until that question has lost ‘energy’.

**Voting**

Questions of fact or alternative solutions can sometimes be in dispute with two or more answers having several supporters. Sometimes you can engineer this situation by deliberately posing a question that will expose common student misconceptions.

You can take advantage of this by putting the ‘candidates’ (alternative answers) on the board and asking the advocates of each answer to make their case. You can then call for a vote.

Making their own case, listening to the reasoning of others and challenging the thinking behind alternative solutions really deepens understanding. It also exposes potential misconceptions in a way that the whole group can appreciate.

You will need to know your groups’ dynamics well and manage the victory and loss of the election with sensitivity, but if used regularly and with good humour voting should promote a collective inquisitiveness that is very productive.

**Students compose questions for each other**

This technique is great because it doubles or trebles the points at which students are challenged to think about their learning.

This is normally done in writing rather than through oral questioning. Questions can be composed (and answered) individually or collectively.

As well as having to answer a question composed for them by a peer, students have to compose a question themselves based on their own learning. This is harder than it sounds and learners find it very demanding.

The greatest amount of learning often emerges when the author and recipient of a question debate its validity as written. This can sometimes be a source of controversy and hence rich learning – “This isn’t clear.” “This doesn’t make sense.” “It would have been better if you had said…”

**Who wants to be a millionaire? (or who wants to be a plumber? or who wants to be a physicist? etc)**

TV and radio quiz shows are a great source of questioning formats. The creators are employed to come up with engaging formats so why not take advantage? These formats also have the advantage of being immediately understandable and accessible to most students.

You can run this game either for individuals or teams.
For those unfamiliar with the TV show, contestants get three ‘lifelines’ they can use when they are unsure of the answer – phone a friend, 50:50 or ask the audience.

Give each student or team three cards representing each lifeline and collect them in as they use them up. The format has to be adapted a little:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone a friend</td>
<td>They get to choose a friend to ask in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50:50</td>
<td>You put two options on the board (one right and one wrong) for them to choose from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask the audience</td>
<td>You put four options including the correct answer on the board and the whole class votes on what they think the right answer is. They choose whether to trust the audience or not.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The game does need careful classroom management and there are a few nuances to watch out for:

- You need to ensure that certain ‘friends’ are not over asked

You may simply have to disallow certain requests and make students choose someone else. Alternatively, you might establish a rule whereby everyone can only be a ‘friend’ once per game.

- In the TV show one wrong answer means the contestant loses

This format has to be abandoned as it would de-motivate those giving wrong answers and leave them outside of the fun with nothing to do. You could simply ignore this rule and play the game non-competitively. Alternatively, you can get round it by awarding points for each correct answer, but none for a wrong one.

**Phone a Friend**

You need not play the whole ‘millionaire’ game. You could just use its ‘phone a friend’ idea. You could establish ‘phone a friend’ as an option permanently available to students during direct questioning in your lessons. It certainly encourages active listening. The same classroom management issues about potential overuse apply.

**15:1 nomination**

Again this TV quiz show format is very engaging, and has an interesting concept that you might wish to ‘borrow’ - that a learner correctly answering a question can nominate the next person to be asked.

Again this needs to be handled with appropriate humour and skill so that every student can experience success. However, since you are the quizmaster you can ensure that the weakest attainers enjoy the game by asking them questions at an appropriate level of difficulty. Likewise, the strongest can be challenged with the toughest questions.

This principle of differentiation is equally applicable to all these TV quiz game formats. By asking questions appropriate to individual learner need you ought to be able to arrange for everyone to be a ‘winner’ if you choose to make the games competitive. For example, if you play two rounds between two teams you ought to be able to ‘engineer’ a one all draw.

**Blockbusters**

This is another old TV favourite that will be quite novel for most students. It’s ideal for a competitive game between two equal teams if the class size is manageable.

The hexagon grid can be hard to create so a blank grid is provided on the page opposite for adaptation and filling with letters.

If you want an electronic version just email: teaching.helpdesk@lewisham.ac.uk
• Each team must work their way across the grid by answering questions

• Letter(s) in each hexagon represent the first letter(s) of the answer. For example, if a team selects NPF a maths teacher might ask “What is 95 ÷ 10?” – the answer is Nine Point Five

• The grid can be projected or written on the board although teams should also have paper copies to help them follow the game

• When a team answers a question correctly the hexagon is turned into their colour (coloured board pens are essential here)

• One team works vertically and wins if they make a continuous chain of orange connecting the top of the grid to the bottom

• The other team works horizontally and tries to make a continuous chain in yellow from one side of the grid to the other

• Routes are valid no matter how circuitous, but it is not possible for both teams to achieve their aim. A well ‘engineered’ game can therefore often come down to a final question where both would form their winning chain if they answered correctly

• The team that answered the last question correctly gets to choose the next hexagon at stake

• The right to answer a question is open and thus competitive. This makes the game very lively and fun, but it therefore also needs good classroom management skills. Only accepting answers through nominated team captains who have indicated their readiness to answer, and being strict about answers shouted out is a good way of preventing it from getting too lively!

• If a team gets the answer wrong (or breaks the rules by shouting out) the other team has the right to answer. The enforcement of this rule gives you the greatest opportunity to surreptitiously ‘engineer’ proceedings without resorting to dishonesty or unequal treatment

• Always have two questions at different levels of difficulty ready for each hexagon, but the ability to make up an appropriate question on the spot is still essential

• Generally prepare two grids, but also track which questions you have asked. With a quick amendment to the grid unused questions can always be recycled to supply tiebreaker questions when teams get all the prepared questions for one hexagon wrong

**Final Thoughts**

Snowballing, voting and peer questioning are ideal for promoting learning and are best used at the heart of a lesson.

They deepen understanding through reflection and discussion by challenging students to explain their thinking and engage with the reasoning of others.

Questioning formats based on TV shows like who wants to be a millionaire, blockbusters and 15:1 are better suited for checks on learning at a lower ‘mastery’ level – recall of knowledge, and the understanding of concepts.

They are a good way to end a session. Research shows that finishing with a ‘mastery’ quiz sends learners away with a recent memory of achievement and a positive feeling about the lesson. It is therefore highly motivating.

**Let us know what you think**

If you wish to give any feedback, make a contribution yourself or have a suggestion for topics of future issues then please contact Kit Jillings, Assistant Director Teacher Training at Kit.Jillings@lewisham.ac.uk or ext. 3271

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**In Issue three...**

Advice on starting and ending lessons.