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Investigating language teachers' 'take-ups' from an in-service short course.

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- Encouraging interaction

Teacher-learner	1.Responses directed at the teacher. Teacher answers own questions. 2. Individual responses to the teacher.	1.Teacher-centred. Teacher asked and learners responded by showing hands. 2. Still teacher-centred. 3. Learners worked individually.	2. Answers directed to the teacher 3. Teacher marks as learners work.
Learner-learner			

With Teacher D the teaching of all lessons was teacher-centered. On many occasions she answered her own questions. It is not clear whether this happened because the teacher was desperate that learners were not responding to her questions, or whether it is a general tendency for this teacher to teach this way. There was no pause after questions were posed to allow learners to think about the answer. No clue was provided to lead learners to think about a required answer as suggested by Young (1992). Lack of consistency in the way questions were asked could have further confused learners.

Although learners were seated in groups, at no stage were they encouraged to work with each other. At one point in one of the lessons learners were stopped from helping one another to complete a task. Chisholm, et. al. (2000), as cited in Brodie, et. al. (2002:94) argue that teachers may believe that they are engaging learners according to changes associated with a learner-centred classroom where group work is used to engage learners in a lesson. However, as much as they are 'aware of the need to make learners participate in the learning process, they understand this in procedural terms, rather than as something which promotes learning'. This will mean that grouping of learners would be as far as it would go, as learners would still participate individually without helping one another in the process of learning.

For the second lesson no introduction to reading was given. The teacher read most of the text. She explained vocabulary, not giving learners an opportunity to guess or to give meanings of words they may already know or synonyms for the words. Later, individuals were asked to read. The teacher never intervened if a learner's pronounciation was not correct. Questions were mostly for assessing comprehension of the content of the text. Other questions asked were to find out if learners had knowledge of the use of proverbs. No follow up activity was done after the reading.

In the third lesson learners had to complete a comprehension exercise. The reading was done in the same way as in the reading lesson. Then learners had to work individually to answer questions based on the text. Learners' work was marked as they wrote. The questions required learners to refer to the text for answers, which were factual answers.

Teacher D did not do much that can be associated with the questioning techniques demonstrated in the course. What was observed in her classroom contradicted what she said in the interview that questions are useful for promoting group work, and that questions increase learners' thinking. This may be proof that 'old habits die hard'. The teacher is comfortable with methods of teaching she finds easy to use. It seems that input from the course did not make much difference to her pedagogy.

4.3.5: Teacher E

Teacher E holds a BA in Education and Remedial Education. She teaches a multicultural class in which the majority of learners are English second or additional language speakers. English is the teacher's home language. She has been teaching for the past eighteen years. She teaches English, Computer Science and Life Orientation.

Teacher E is the only teacher who agreed to be videotaped. The videotapes were *viewed after the lessons and data* related to questioning are recorded the same way as was done *in other lessons observed* for this study. The three lessons include reading - where learners *practised using the* techniques of skimming and scanning a text - changing active *voice to passive voice* and acrostic poetry. Below is a recorded schedule for Teacher *E:*

Table Five: Teacher *E*

- Levels and purpose of questioning.

	Introduction	body/input	conclusion
Knowledge	1=7 2=9 3=6	1=15 2=9 3=12	1=2 2=6 3=1
Comprehension	1=6 2=3 3=1	1=1 2=2 3=2	1=1 2=0 3=1
Application/ reorganisation		1=0 2=2 3=3	
Evaluation		1=1 2=1 3=1	
Appreciation		1=0 2=0 3=1	
Inference			

- Learners' questions

	3.Confirmation question eg. *'Is it* like SOS?'	2. Learners asked questions to clarify the rule for changing tenses. Other questions were to check with the teacher if their answers were correct. 3. Wanting to know *if their choices* were correct. What about something scary?' *Other questions* were confirming their understanding of what they had to do.	2. The teacher was often called to check *if what they* were doing was according to what she expected.

- Encouraging interaction

Teacher-learner	1. Responses directed at the teacher. 2. Individual responses to the teacher. *3. Teacher-learner* participation	1. Although learners were encouraged to work in groups, individuals presented answers *without consulting with* members of the group – the teacher *made* them aware of this violation.	*2. Individual gave* answers to the teacher 3. Teacher did marking as individuals completed *writing.*
Learner-learner		In all three lessons group or pair work was *encouraged by asking learners to* discuss the questions or to do an activity given to groups. Even though learners engaged in groups, responses were from individuals. The teacher did not ignore this behaviour. *She made them aware* that if they share answers they will be *able to choose the one they think* is more appropriate and present it.	

Teacher E's lessons encouraged learner participation. *It was obvious that learners knew* what to do once they were assigned to do something. *One concern of the researcher is* that learners are not yet aware that if they work in groups there *must be an answer* decided by the group to give for feed back. But this aspect of *their work is likely to* improve since the teacher is aware of it and she spoke to the *learners about it. The* distribution of questions engaged learners in assessing their *understanding. Most* questions were closed questions. Although from time to time *the teacher used open-*ended questions, these did not get much priority in the lessons. *This does not mean that* such questions did not have a place in the lessons, it is only that the *phrasing of the* teacher's questions was not making learners look beyond what was *in front of them.*

Teacher E is similar to those described by Adler, Slonimisky and Reed (2002) who have knowledge of education theory, who understand learners' difficulties and use questions to lead and guide towards better learning. In every lesson taught there was evidence of learning taking place because the teacher was confident with what she was teaching. However, it seems that the teacher avoided questions that engaged learners in

high-level conceptual thinking. It is possible that she avoided the use of open-ended questions because she was not comfortable with the various answers learners could give, but this is speculation.

4.3.6: Concluding comments on the observations

In this study, the focus was on the frequency, type and level of teachers' questions at each stage of a lesson, how questions stimulate learners' interaction, and to some extent on finding out if learners' questions play a significant role in the process of teaching and learning. The following is a quantitative summary of what was observed. The columns are divided into types and levels of questions, when questions were asked in a lesson and the average tallies.

Types of questions	**Total number of questions during observation (15 lessons)**	**Average of total number of questions asked per lesson**
Closed	228	19
Open	61	5
Management questions	25	0.08
Learners' questions	74	6.1

The average tallies indicate that the approach to learning and teaching envisaged for outcomes-based education was not the dominant one in the lessons observed. Factual questions still dominate questions that require the learner to think. The average tallies indicate that questions in the category of open-ended questions are scarcely used in some classrooms. This contradicts the claims by teachers that since they had been to the OBE language course, they have increased the use of open-ended questions to stimulate thinking. The calculation was based on how many questions were asked for

each type of questions, and these were added and divided by the number of lessons. Management questions are questions that checked for understanding like: 'Do you know what to do now?' The questions were used often to check with learners if they understood what to do or what was said. The learners' questions include those asked to confirm their understanding or for clarity.

In one of the lessons observed, learners did interviews with one another. Well thought out questions were prepared and asked by learners. The researcher was told that the preparation for this exercise took two weeks before the actual presentation. The learners' communication during the exercise proved that they understood the task, and that they had research skills. Most of the learners were fluent in their dialogue. Such activities can also give learners responsibility for what they learn in the classroom.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

As noted in Chapter Two there is considerable debate about whether short courses or workshops contribute to the professional development of teachers. The intention of the research was to find out what teachers who attended an OBE language course on questioning claimed to have 'taken up' from the course and what a selection of these teachers had put into practice in their classrooms.

The data from the questionnaires indicate that most teachers believe that they benefited from the in-service course on questioning. Most teachers said that they felt more confident in using different types and levels of questions; that they gave thought to the purposes of questions they asked in class; and that the questions enabled learners to actively engage in the lessons. However, the researcher is well aware that self-report data has limitations (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999).

Not all responses make clear what teachers may have 'taken-up' from the course and some of the responses given do not relate to the questions asked. The level of language competence in some of the responses is a concern, given that all of the teachers are language teachers. With hindsight, more information might have been obtained if teachers had been given a series of statements with which to agree or disagree. However, the more open-ended questions used, did elicit a range of interesting responses.

The data obtained through classroom observation in some instances confirmed trends evident in the analysis of the interviews but in others contradicted these trends. Most questions used by Teachers A to E were closed, lower order questions which elicited

information on what learners had learned in a lesson. In other words, they were 'checking questions'. Teachers A, B, C and E did include open-ended questions to some extent. These questions challenged and encouraged learners to think about a range of possible answers. The learners in Teacher A and E's classes engaged in group discussions which gave them opportunities to think and help each other present interesting responses. In Teacher B's class learners were encouraged to use challenging questions with their partners during an interview project. In the teacher interviews these three teachers indicated that the short course had extended what they already knew and had given them further confidence that they were on the right track. The course had also given them a new discourse with which to discuss their work with colleagues and with the researcher. In the case of Teacher D, classroom observation revealed very little 'take-up' from the course. Learners were not assisted to develop understanding of 'higher-order' concepts and alternative perspectives as questions used still encouraged 'acquisition of lower-level facts and information' (Welch, 2002:28).

In the interview, Teacher C claimed to have found the course useful in giving him new ideas to use in his classroom. In the lessons observed, there was evidence of partial 'take-up': he was able to ask questions that were appropriate to his purposes, but he was seldom able to work productively with learners' answers.

What was observed in the classrooms seems to support Schon's argument that change may be difficult for some teachers because of the challenges of moving 'through the zones of uncertainty ... the situation of being lost, of confronting more information than you can handle' (Schon in Fullan, 2001:31). It can be concluded that there are differences between what some teachers said and the actual practice in the classroom, that is differences between their espoused and enacted practices. The greatest

similarities between what teachers said about their use of questions and what they were observed to do, was in the classes of those teachers judged most confident and competent by the researcher. These were also the teachers with four-year degrees as opposed to a two or three year diploma. This finding supports the view of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) that teachers with 'deep knowledge' are likely to be more skilled in the classroom. It also suggests that in-service courses for teachers should take into consideration the differing needs of participants. 'One size fits all' courses do not meet the needs of all teachers equally.

Another finding from this small-scale research project is that the teachers observed used questions mainly as a tool for teaching and for eliciting information, but not sufficiently to encourage learners to think about what they learn. This suggests that in-service professional development courses should include input and activities on the promotion of critical thinking in the classroom.

Teachers A and B work at the same school. They claimed that it had been beneficial for them to attend the course together and there was evidence of productive collaboration in the lessons observed. This suggests that providers of teacher development courses should encourage more than one teacher from a school to participate or that whole school development initiatives should be considered. The deputy principal of Teacher C's school asked the researcher to conduct a workshop on questioning for all the staff so that ideas could be shared and used by everyone.

In conclusion, findings from this research indicate that even short courses can provide teachers with new skills and knowledge and can be productive for change. However,

for teachers with limited initial teacher education even though they have been in the classroom for a long time, short courses may not provide sufficient support to bring about significant changes in classroom practice. Such teachers may benefit more from sustained support in their schools from both colleagues and support services provided by the Department of Education. Ball, in Wilson and Berne (1999:175), advocates a professional development model that involves long term support for teachers that is classroom-based and in which teachers work collaboratively.

The findings from this project support the findings reported in Adler and Reed (2002) that 'take-up' from in-service courses for teachers is different for each teacher in terms of what is taken up and how what has been taken up is then used in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A

The Principal and colleagues

Dear Colleagues

I enjoyed working with the Grade 5 teachers who participated in the *OBE LLC* in-service programme at the College of Education and hope that you found the programme helpful.

I am now conducting some research as part of my MA in English Language Education degree to investigate 'take-up' of the input on questioning that formed part of the LLC programme. I would like to use a tape recorder and video-tape to capture data during interviews and classroom observations.

The teachers who will be part of the research will be invited to a make a choice as to whether to keep the video-taped work or allow the researcher to keep it for further use. The interview tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

The names of the teachers and schools will not be mentioned anywhere in the research report. Numbers and letters of the alphabet will be used instead.

If you are willing to participate in the research and accept the procedure outlined above, please fill in the statement of agreement below.

Yours sincerely

Mathakga Botha

(APPENDIX B)

Statement of agreement

Please sign and return.

(Delete the inappropriate)

1. I ..... agree/do not agree to be part of the case study to be conducted in the English Language classroom/s in which I teach.
2. I agree/do not agree to be interviewed before and after the classroom observation.
3. I agree/do not agree to the interviews being tape-recorded.
4. I agree/do not agree that the researcher can use a video camera during observation of my teaching.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Contact numbers and possible times:

Tel: home:..... possible contact time .....

work:..... Possible contact time .....

fax: home: .....

work: .....

(APPENDIX C i)

QUESTIONNAIRE

I am conducting some research into the ways in which teachers use questions in the classroom. In July 2001 you attended a week long in-service programme of workshops, at the College of Education at Wits (JCE).

I would be grateful if you could spend a few minutes of your time in answering the following questions.

It is not necessary to write your name, but in order to make comparisons across teachers and the contexts in which you work, please begin by giving the following information:

Name of your school: .....

Highest Qualification:.....

.....

Years of teaching experience:.....

Subjects taught at school:.....

.....

.....

1. The course on questioning included the following:

   - Purposes of questioning
   - Types and levels of questions
   - Questions and instructions
   - Critical questioning

Which one of these did you find most useful and why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

(APPENDIX C ii)

QUESTIONNAIRE

I am conducting some research into the ways in which teachers use questions in the classroom. In July 2001 you attended a week long in-service programme of workshops, at the College of Education at Wits (JCE).

I would be grateful if you could spend a few minutes of your time in answering the following questions.

It is not necessary to write your name, but in order to make comparisons across teachers and the contexts in which you work, please begin by giving the following information:

Name of your school: Winchester Ridge Primary School

Highest Qualification: B.Ed

Years of teaching experience: 6

Subjects taught at school: LLC - English, LO, LLC Zulu, HSS, A&C

1. The course on questioning included the following:

- Purposes of questioning
- Types and levels of questions
- Questions and instructions
- Critical questioning

Which one of these did you find most useful and why?

Questions & instructions : Gr 5 pupils don't know how to read Questions & follow instructions

(APPENDIX D)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you decide which questions to ask for each lesson you are going to teach?
2. Do you ever write questions that you will ask learners before you teach?
3. During the course we looked at types and levels of questions as in Barrett's taxonomy. Which of these questioning techniques do you use, when and why do you use them?
4. Since you have different ways you ask questions, would you say these have improved learners' comprehension and participation?

(APPENDIX E)

Classroom Observation Schedule

1. **Levels and purposes of questioning.**

	Introduction	body/input	conclusion
Knowledge			
Comprehension			
Application/ reorganisation			
Evaluation			
Appreciation			
Inference			
Other			

2. **Learners' questions**

	Introduction	body/input	conclusion

3. **Encouraging interaction**

	Introduction	body/input	conclusion
Teacher-learner			
Learner-learner			

QUESTIONING, A KEY FACTOR IN MAXIMISING COMPREHENSION

Clymer (1968) describes Barrett's five broad levels of questioning. They should not be used sequentially (i.e. level 1 for less experienced readers moving up to level 5 for those with more experience). All levels should be used at all stages of the readers growth, beginning with the pre-school child who is being read to and who is looking at pictures.

1 Literal comprehension focuses on ideas and information which are explicitly stated in the text. Recognition is the key skill. Recognition tasks are:

a) Recognition of details. The student is required to locate or identify facts such as the names of characters, the time of the story, or the place of the story.

b) Recognition of main ideas. The student is asked to locate or identify an explicit statement in or from a text which is a main idea of a paragraph or a larger portion of the text.

c) Recognition of a sequence. The student is required to locate or identify the order of incidents or actions explicitly stated in the text.

d) Recognition of comparison. The student is requested to locate or identify likenesses and differences in characters, times and places that are explicitly stated in the text.

e) Recognition of cause and effect relationships. The student in this instance may be required to locate or identify the explicitly stated reasons for certain happenings or actions in the text.

f) Recognition of character traits. The student is required to identify or locate explicit statements about a character which helps to point up the type of person he is.

KEY PHRASES FOR LITERAL QUESTIONS

Identify	Find.....
Point out.....	Show me .....
Read/quote the line that	Locate .....
Describe	State .....

2 REORGANIZATION

Requires the student to analyze, synthesize, and/or organize ideas or information explicitly stated in the text.

REORGANISATION TASKS ARE:

a) Classifying. In this instance the student is required to place people, things, places, and/or events into categories.

b) Outlining. The student is requested to organize the text into outline form using direct statements or paraphrased statements from the text.

KEY PHRASES FOR INFERENTIAL QUESTIONS

Pretend	What might have happened if .....
Suppose	If we assume .....
Could	What consequences .....
What are the implications.....	

4. EVALUATION.

The student is required to make evaluative judgements by comparing ideas presented in the text with external criteria provided by the teacher, other authorities, or other written sources, or with internal criteria provided by the reader's experiences, knowledge or values. It may be demonstrated by:

a) Judgements of reality or fantasy. Could this really happen? Such a question calls for a judgement by the reader based on his experience.

b) Judgements of fact or opinion. Does the author provide adequate support for his conclusions? Is the author attempting to sway your thinking? Questions of this type require the student to analyze and evaluate the writing on the basis of the knowledge he has on the subject as well as to analyze and evaluate the intent of the author.

c) Judgements of adequacy and validity. Is the information presented here in keeping with what you have read on the subject in other sources? Questions of this nature call for the reader to compare written sources of information, with an eye toward agreement and disagreement or completeness and incompleteness.

d) Judgements of appropriateness. What part of the story best describes the main character? Such a question requires the reader to make a judgement about the relative adequacy of different parts of the selection to answer the question.

e) Judgements of worth, desirability and acceptability. Was the character right or wrong in what he did? Was his behaviour good or bad? Questions of this nature call for judgements based on the reader's moral code or his value system.

KEY PHRASES FOR EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Should	Would you have .....
In your opinion	Is it right that .....
Do you agree	What best describes .....

5. APPRECIATION calls for the student to be emotionally and aesthetically sensitive to the work and to have a reaction to the worth of its psychological and artistic elements. This includes:

a) Emotional response to the content. The student is required to verbalize his feelings about the text in terms of interest, excitement, boredom, fear, hate, amusement, etc. It is concerned with the emotional impact of the total work on the reader.

b) Identification with characters or incidents. Teachers' questions of this nature will elicit response from the reader which demonstrate his sensitivity to, sympathy for, and empathy with characters and happenings portrayed by the author.

c) Reactions to the author's use of language. In this instance the student is required to respond to the author's craftmanship in terms of the semantic dimensions of the selection, namely, connotations and denotations of words.

d) Imagery. In this instance, the reader is required to verbalize his feelings with regard to the author's artistic ability to paint word pictures which cause the reader to visualize, smell, taste, hear or feel.

KEY PHRASES FOR APPRECIATION QUESTIONS

What did you think when .....
Is this word/phrase effective for .....
Do you know anyone like .....
Why did you like/dislike .....

NOTES

The older or more experienced reader may take a while to adapt to open-ended questioning. Many years of practice in matching answers to teacher's thinking may well bring resistance to independent thinking. To combat this several measures may be necessary.

- Reduce written responses to questions as much as you are able. Oral responses do not leave evidence and allow for greater risk-taking. An exchange of ideas among pupils and teacher will develop the understanding that several answers may be equally acceptable.

- Change marking methods for written work. Open-ended questions require evaluation which allows for differences. The quality of the justification for an answer becomes more important than the answer itself. Dialogue with the pupil in some instances will be more appropriate than a mark.

- Create many short comprehension experiences as well as the more formal sessions. These may occur at the beginning of the day or lesson and last only a minute or two. The material can be drawn from anywhere. Consider:

  newspaper - cartoons
  - articles
  - pictures
  - editorials, etc.

  jokes, comic strips,
  notices, placards, slogans
  advertisements
  announcements etc.

Encourage pupils to bring in material and lead discussion.

c) Summarizing. The student is asked to condense the text using direct or paraphrased statements from the text.

d) Synthesizing. In this instance, the student is requested to consolidate explicit ideas or information from more than one source.

KEY PHRASES FOR REORGANISATION QUESTIONS

List	Paraphrase .....
Compare	Classify .....
Contrast	Summarise .....
Divide -- into	How is -- different to .....

1. INFERENTIAL COMPREHENSION

is demonstrated by the student when he uses the ideas and information explicitly stated in the text, his intuition, and his personal experience as a basis for conjectures and hypotheses. Inferential comprehension is stimulated by purposes for reading and teachers' questions which demand thinking and imagination that go beyond the printed page - reading between the lines.

a) Inferring supporting details. In this instance, the student is asked to conjecture about additional facts the author might have included in the text which would have made it more informative, interesting, or appealing.

b) Inferring main ideas. The student is required to provide the main idea, general significance, theme, or moral which is not explicitly stated in the text.

c) Inferring sequence. The student, in this case, may be requested to conjecture as to what action or incident might have taken place between two explicitly stated actions or incidents, or he may be asked to hypothesize about what would happen next if the text had not ended as it did but had been extended.

d) Inferring comparisons. The student is required to infer likenesses and differences in characters, times, or places.

e) Inferring cause and effect relationships. The student is required to hypothesize about the motivations of characters and their interactions with time and place. He may also be required to conjecture as to what caused the author to include certain ideas, words, characterizations, and actions in his writing.

f) Inferring character traits. In this case, the student is asked to hypothesize about the nature of characters on the basis of explicit clues presented in the text.

g) Predicting outcomes. The student is requested to read an initial portion of the selections and on the basis of this reading he is required to conjecture about the outcome of the text.

h) Interpreting figurative language. The student, in this instance, is asked to infer literal meanings from the author's figurative use of language.

2. Briefly describe any changes to your use of questions in the classroom that you have made since the course.

I have been concentrating on Question words. what, Wh-, when etc & pupils must recognise the different question words & answer accordingly

3. If you have noticed any benefit of these changes in your teaching, briefly describe these.

Pupils are now more aware of the importance of Reading Questions & instructions carefully & their answers have improved in general

4. If you still have questions about questioning, please list these.

Thank you!!
Mathakga Botha.

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