TEACHER'S QUESTIONS   OUP Conference, August 2019   Rachel Appleby

(4 pages) Included:
- *A blank format for recording questions: Types, wait time, purpose*
- *A bit of extra back-up theory*

- *Who answers the questions, and how?*
- *'Mapping' who answers questions, and if by choice.*

Why do we ask questions, and what sorts of questions do we ask? Use this form to collect questions in your class!

CLASS: (Level, age, no. of students etc.)					
OVERALL Aims of lesson:					
Teacher's questions	**Q type ***	**Wait time**	**Purpose of Q**	**Student response**	**Your comments**
OK. Shall we check the homework?	*CM*	*30 secs*	*move to next stage*	*Ss open their books*	*not a real question; = instruction*
So, Ana, what sort of films do you like?	*Ref.*	*4 secs*	*to motivate, personalise*	*"em, I like .. comedies, thriller"*	*Ana very motivated; seems pleased to be involved*

* e.g. Dis / Ref / CM = Display / Referential / Classroom Management (You can analyse this after the class.)

TEACHER'S QUESTIONS   **Why do we ask questions?** – a bit more back-up theory

Well, sometimes simply for managing the class (= **procedural questions**). However, two other types of questions relate to the students' learning:
Display questions are ones the Teacher knows the answer to (e.g. checking an exercise). They are designed to <u>display</u> the students' knowledge (e.g. from a listening comprehension task), or a target vocabulary item. These are very frequent in language classrooms.
Referential questions are genuine questions, such as the ones we use in real life, e.g. "How was your weekend?" Teachers don't know the answers to these. They prompt higher-level thinking than display questions, and can be much more motivating.

You might also like to think about questions in terms of the following categories:
- **open** questions (often *Why.. ,* or *What do you think* questions)
- **closed** questions (sometimes *Yes / No*, or polar questions, or asking for fixed facts: *Where / When / Who* etc)

Wait time: It's important to give students time to process a question, and come up with an answer. Sometimes we don't give enough time (record in seconds).
Purpose: We use questions for a variety of reasons – to warm up the students, to motivate the students, etc. (see Ur, P. below)
Response: Consider both the **quantity** and the **quality** of the response: this will have significant bearing on how effective the question was.

CLASS: (Level, age, no. of students etc.)					
OVERALL Aims of lesson:					
Teacher's questions	**Q type ***	**Wait time**	**Purpose of Q**	**Student response**	**Your comments**
So, Ana, what sort of films do you like?	*Ref.*	*4 secs*	*to motivate, personalise*	*"em, I like .. comedies, thriller"*	*Ana very motivated; seems pleased to be involved*

* e.g. Dis / Ref / CM = Display / Referential / Classroom Management questions (You can analyse this after the class.)
If you manage to collect many questions, you could analyse them according to the following. Comparing two classes of different levels can be interesting!
- What was the ratio of display / referential questions?
- Did the questions achieve their aim? (= purpose)
- How effective were the questions, according to the quantity and quality of the responses?
- Is there any connection between the type of question, and the complexity of the response?
- Does the T use different question types at different stages of the lesson? Why?
- Did the students' level affect the type of questions the teacher used? How?

References
Hopkins, D. (1985). *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. Open University. p6-12, 86-8, 91-3. (… *looks at the quality of the students' responses, how long teachers wait for a response, the atmosphere good questions can build, and which students are asked questions*.)
Scrivener, J. *Classroom Management Techniques*. CUP. 4.6 (*question types, purposes, and nominating students*)
Ur, P. (1991). *A course in language teaching.* CUP. Module 16, p228-232. (*includes criteria for effective questioning*)
Wajnryb, R. (1992). *Classroom Observation Tasks*. CUP. 2.2 'The language of questions', p46-48.

MORE ON QUESTIONS:

Which of the following are true for you? Find out more by audio-/video-recording your lesson.

How do <u>you</u> handle questions?

< - Never – Sometimes – Usually – Always - >

	N	S	U	A
1. I ask a mix of individual / open-class Qs.				
2. I use Qs to wake Ss up / get their attention.				
3. *(in this order:)* I nominate* a S, and then ask the Q. (name)				
4. If a S doesn't understand, I immediately rephrase the Q.				
5. I immediately acknowledge if an answer is correct or not.				
6. I ask Ss to nominate other Ss to answer.				
7. I let Ss write down their ideas before they say anything.				
8. I ask Ss to discuss ideas in pairs before they answer.				

You could use the format below, or devise your own, depending on what exactly you want to focus on.
You can easily use the audio recording function on a smart phone to do this. About 15' of your lesson will be enough to give you a starter sample!

CLASS: (Level, age, no. of students etc.)						
OVERALL Aims of lesson:						
Teacher's questions	**Ss write down answers first**	**Ss discuss answers in pairs first**	**T nominates Ss**	**Ss volunteer answer**	**T response**	**Your comments**
OK. Shall we check the homework?						

QUESTION DISTRIBUTION

You could, alternatively, ask a trusted colleague to sit in a watch your lesson. They could use the following to track how you ask Qs, and which Ss answer:

1. Question distribution
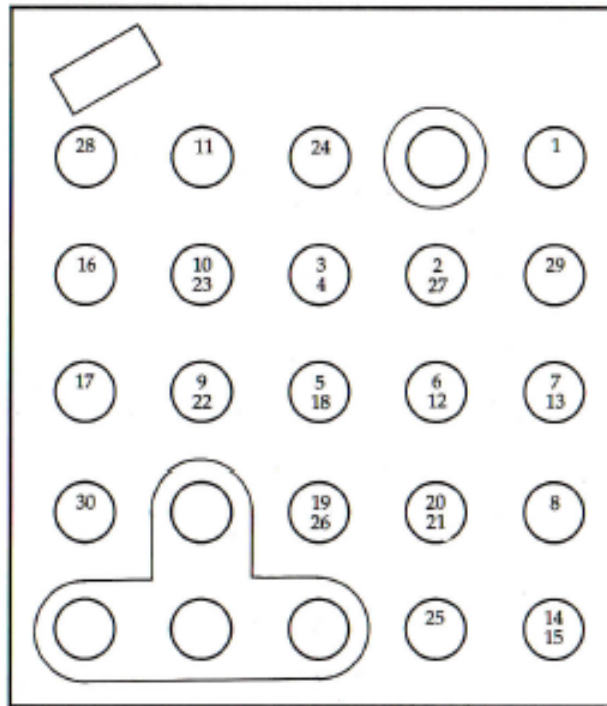Write the Q no. in the circle (= student) if S. answered a Q. ↓
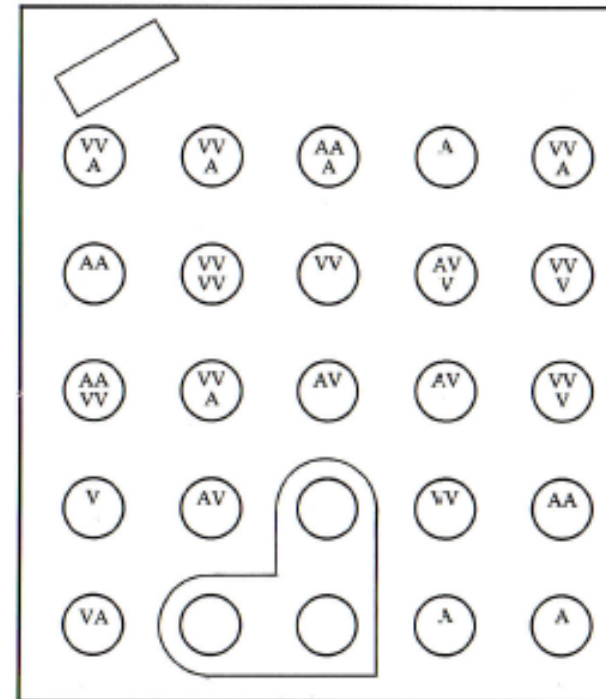↓

2. Student participation
V = volunteered an answer ↓
↓ A = S. asked to answer (V1, V2 etc.)

BOX 7.1

BOX 7.2

Hopkins, D. (1985). *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. Open University.

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