

Teaching and Learning at Cherry Trees School – Effective Questioning using Blank Levels.

Questions are an integral part of classroom practice and essential to every teacher's pedagogical repertoire. They are also one of the elements of effective formative assessment (Black et al., 2003). Questioning serves many purposes: it engages students in the learning process and provides opportunities for students to ask questions themselves.



The 'Blank Levels of Questioning', sometimes known as the 'Language of Learning' model, was developed by Blank, Rose and Berlin in 1978. Its main aim is to develop pupil's verbal reasoning and abstract language capabilities. There are 4 levels of questioning which move from simple, concrete questions to more difficult, abstract questions. Blank's questions encourage development of general language and vocabulary, as well as skills in comprehension, reasoning, inferencing, predicting and problem solving.

It is important that all staff are aware of the Blank Level Assessment for each pupil in their class and that use this knowledge to plan effective, subject specific questions. The most effective questioning is considered and planned for ahead of the lesson. In all lessons that were observed as good or better the teacher had an understanding of the Blank Levels of the pupils in the class and used this to adapt their language accordingly.

Level 1 – Naming things

At this level, the pupil will be able to apply language to what the pupil sees in the world. The information is directly in front of them, or recently removed. Responses are short or non-verbal, for example, pointing.

Level 1	Example question
Scanning for a matching object	Find me one like this
Identifying an object by sound and touch	Show me what you heard or touched
Naming an object heard, touched and seen	What did you hear or touch? What is this?

Imitating a simple sentences	Say this...
Remembering pictured objects	What did you see?
Remembering incidental information	What did you see?

Level 2 – Describing things

At this level, the information is supplied, but not directly apparent. Your pupil has to select what to attend to, such as, size, colour, and function of an object.

Level 2	Example question
Scanning for an object defined by its function	Find one that can...
Describing a scene	What is happening?
Recalling items named in a statement	What things..?
Recalling information from a statement	Who? What? Where?
Completing a sentence	Finish this...
Concepts: Naming characteristics and functions of objects	Tell me its...
Concepts: Attending to two characteristics	Find one that is... and ...
Concepts: Identifying differences	How are these things different?
Concepts: Citing an example within a category	Name something that is a ...

Level 3 – Talking about stories and events

At this level, the language does not relate directly to what your pupil sees or hears, but instead your pupil must think and reorder the information given. Certain basic facts must be considered and evaluated before responding.

Level 3	Example question
Scanning for an object by integrating verbal and visual information	Find one to use with this
Describing events subsequent to a scene	What will happen next?
Assuming the role of another person	What could he say?
Following a set of directions	Do this, then this
Arranging pictures in a sequence	Make these into...
Formulating a set of directions	Tell me how to...
Formulating a generalisation about a set of events	What happened to all of these?
Formulating a statement to unify a sequence of pictures	Tell this story
Concepts: Identifying similarities	How are these the same?
Concepts: Selecting an object by exclusion	Find the ones that are not...
Concepts: Selecting a set of objects by exclusion	Find things that are not...
Concepts: Citing an example by excluding a specific object	Name something that can... but is not a ...
Concepts: Citing an example by excluding a class of objects	Name something that is not a...
Concepts: Defining words	What is a...?

Unusual imitations	Say this...
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Level 4 – Solving problems

At this level, your pupil has to reason beyond what is seen, heard or said. Your pupil needs to draw on past experiences, make parallels, examine causes and likely effects, as well as justify the decision made.

Level 4	Example question
Predicting: Changes in position	Where will...?
Predicting: Changes in structure	What will happen if...?
Justifying a prediction	Why will...?
Justifying a decision: Essential characteristics	Why wouldn't it...?
Justifying a decision: Non-essential characteristics	Why would it...?
Identifying the causes of an event	What made it happen?
Formulating a solution	What could you do?
Formulating a solution from another's perspective	What could she do?
Selecting the means to a goal	What could we use?
Explaining the means to a goal	Why should we use that?
Explaining the construction of objects	Why is... made of that?
Explaining an inference drawn from an observation	How can we tell?
Explaining the logic of compound words	Why is this called...?
Explaining the obstacles to an action	Why can't we...?

Examples of questions at Blank Levels 1-4 – Play and continuous provision



Home corner

Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me a cup
- Find another one like this
- Where is the teapot?

Level 2

- What do we cut with?
- What other food can we have to eat? (objects in sight)
- Find me a big plate
- Teddy is eating cake and dolly is eating strawberries. Who is eating cake?

Level 3

- Give teddy a drink and then give dolly some cake
- Tell me how to make a sandwich
- Teddy wants a cup of tea. What does he say?
- Teddy is eating dolly's cake. How does dolly feel?

Level 4

- What do we need to make a cake?
- Why can't we cook the cake in the washing machine?
- Teddy feels ill. Why do you think teddy feels ill?
- What could we do to make teddy feel better?



Water play

Level 1

- What is this?
- Find another one like this
- What did you see in the water?
- Where is the boat?

Level 2

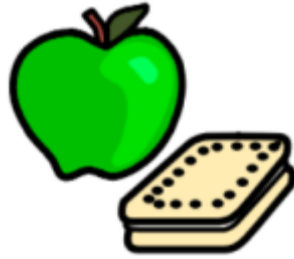
- Show me something we can use to catch the fish
- What other animals live in the water? (objects in sight)
- Find me a red fish
- The fish is swimming under the boat. Where is the fish?

Level 3

- Catch a fish and put it in the bucket
- Find me something that lives in the water that does not have feet
- What is a frog?
- Baby duck is lost, what does he say? How does he feel?

Level 4

- Why can't a fish live out of the water?
- Why did the bucket sink?
- Baby duck is lost, what could he do? What would you do?
- What else could you use to catch a fish? (objects not in sight)



Snack time

Level 1

- What is this?
- Which one is the banana?
- What are these called?
- What are you eating?

Level 2

- What do we use to cut the apple?
- Name some other fruit we have or snack (objects in sight)
- Milk comes from cows. Where does milk come from?
- What shape is your plate?

Level 3

- Which food on your plate is not fruit?
- What does 'healthy' mean?
- How do we eat a banana?
- What happens after a snack?

Level 4

- Why do we wash our hands before we eat a snack?
- Why is the milk cold?
- What made the butter melt on your toast?
- Why can't we eat the banana without peeling it?



Farm

Level 1

- What is this?
- Where is the pig?
- Find me the tractor
- Where are the ducks?

Level 2

- Find me something that the farmer drives
- Name me some other farm animals (objects in sight)
- The cows are eating grass and the pig is asleep. Who is sleeping? What are the cows doing?
- Find me the big horse

Level 3

- Put the pig in the tractor and the horse in the barn
- The farmer's dog is hiding. How does the farmer feel? What does the farmer say?
- Find me an animal that does not live on the farm
- What does 'harvest' mean?

Level 4

- The farmer's tractor will not work. What should he do?
- How can the farmer get to the shops now?
- The fence has fallen down. What do you think made the fence fall down?
- Why might the horses run away?



Outside play

Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me a bike
- What did you hear?
- What did you see?

Level 2

- Where is the big ball?
- What other toys can we play with? (objects in sight)
- Find me 2 hoops
- What is happening?

Level 3

- Run and touch the fence and then bring the hoop to me. Ready, steady, go!
- Find me something that you can play with that does not bounce
- What does 'safe' mean?
- Tell me how to play the game

Level 4

- Why will the bike break if I ride it?
- Why can't we play outside when it is raining?
- What makes the car move?
- What should we do to keep safe on the bike?



Playdough

Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me another one like this
- Where is the rolling pin?
- Where are the cutters?

Level 2

- Which one can we use for rolling out the playdough?
- What are you making?
- Find me a star shaped cutter
- Name me some more shapes (objects in sight)

Level 3

- Roll out the playdough and then find me the circle cutter
- Tell me how you made your sausages and stars
- What might happen to the playdough next? (when putting playdough through a press and so on)
- What does 'smooth' mean?

Level 4

- Why can't we roll out the playdough with the cutter?
- What could you do if you did not have a rolling pin?
- What made the playdough go flat?
- Why is it called playdough?



Sandpit

Level 1

- What is this called?
- Find me a bucket
- Where is the spade?
- Find another one like this

Level 2

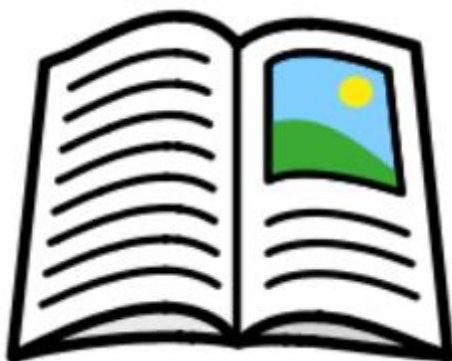
- What are you making?
- Find me something we can use for digging
- Find me the little bucket
- The crab is hiding under the sand and the starfish is in the bucket. Where is the crab?

Level 3

- Find me the digger and then hide it under the sand
- Tell me how to make a sandcastle
- What might happen next? (as you lift the bucket up to reveal the sandcastle)
- I like your shells for decoration. What does decoration mean?

Level 4

- What made the sandcastle fall down?
- What can we do to stop the sandcastle falling down next time?
- The crab is stuck in the sand. What can he do?
- What other things might you find at the seaside? (objects out of sight)



Story

Level 1

- What is this called?
- Where is the... ?
- What did you see?
- Find me the...

Level 2

- Who is it?
- What is that?
- Where are they?
- What is happening?

Level 3

- Tell me the story
- What might happen next?
- How does Alice feel?
- What happens at the beginning and the end?

Level 4

- Why did X do that?
- What could she do?
- What would you do?
- How do you know Y?



Dolls house

Level 1

- What is this called?
- Find me another one like this
- Where is the bath?
- Where are the chairs?

Level 2

- What do we use a chair for?
- We sleep in a...
- Mum is cooking tea and the boy is in his bedroom playing. What is mum doing? Where is the boy? Who is cooking?
- What is happening?

Level 3

- Make the girl hide under the bed and the boy hide in the bath
- The boy is jumping on the table. What might happen next? What might mum say?
- What does 'worried' mean?

Level 4

- How can we tell this is the kitchen?
- Why will the boy get into trouble?
- Mum has burnt her hand cooking. What should she do?
- Why can't we sleep in the bath?



Car mat and garage

Level 1

- What is this?
- Where is the fire engine?
- What did you hear?
- Find the police car

Level 2

- Find the red car
- The car is going to the garage to get some petrol. What is the car doing?
- What is happening?
- What else has wheels? (objects in sight)

Level 3

- The car has arrived at the garage. What happens next?
- Find me something else we can drive that is not a car
- The car will not start. What does the driver say? How does the driver feel?
- What does frustrated mean?

Level 4

- Why will the cars crash?
- What could the silver car do to avoid a crash?
- Oh dear! The cars have crashed. What should we do?
- Why should we wear seatbelts when in a car?

Literacy / English Literature



Level 1

- Name items, real or pictures, for example, 'What's this?'
- Find named items, for example, 'Show me the...'
- Find matching items, for example, 'Find another...like this'
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Level 2

- Answer 'Who?' 'What?', 'Where?' questions about information that has just been given, shown or read. This requires recall.
- Identify properties or attributes, for example, 'Who is kind, mean, generous, ugly, beautiful?', or a plot that is exciting, boring etc.
- Categorise examples, for example, 'Name another character in the story or scene', or show a picture of groceries, 'What fruits can you see?', or ask what settings are used
- Give another example, for example, 'Yes, X is a character. What other characters are in the film or book?'

Level 3

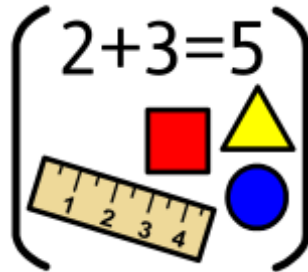
- Summarise information for example, 'What happened to X?'
- Choose a suitable title or name for a story, for example, 'What can you call your story?'
- Retell a short sequence of events or a story, for example, 'Tell me what happened' – it is much easier for the young person to give a recount immediately after hearing it. Gradually increase the time lag between hearing and recounting the events.

- Identify what a character might think or say about a situation in the story, for example, 'What was the boy thinking?' and 'What did his Mum say?'
- Identify how a character might feel in a situation, for example, 'How was the boy feeling?'
- Make a simple prediction about what might happen next. For some young people this will be extremely hard so support them by:
 - o Retelling the sequence of events so far for them
 - o Highlighting the critical elements of the events
 - o Linking the event in the story to the young person's personal experience
- Define words, for example, 'What does suspicious mean?'

Level 4

- Inference – 'How can we tell...?', 'How can we tell that this character is feeling angry or happy, is poor, has committed this crime etc?' Again the young person may need support in identifying critical information in order for an inference to be made.
- Justify a prediction made at Level 3, for example, 'Why do you think that X will happen?'
- Justify the action of a character, for example, 'Why did a character behave in that way?'
- Solve a problem. 'If X happens or doesn't happen, what should the character do? For example, 'If the dog doesn't come home before bedtime, what should the boy do?' Apply the situation to the young person's own personal experience.

Maths



Level 1

- Name items, real or in pictures, for example, shapes, angles, mathematic symbols
- Find named items
- Find matching items

Level 2

- Identify by properties or attributes, for example, more than, the least, total, first, last, heaviest, lightest, smallest
- Categories examples, for example, types of triangles
- Name other shapes in the same category, for example, types of triangle or 4-sided shapes

Level 3

- Identify items that could fit a certain category with specific criteria
- Identify what other items could not fit into a given category
- Understand a series of instructions to complete a sum
- Explain how to complete a sum or mathematical application
- Define words and symbols

Level 4

- Inference – give reasons and evidence why this particular item fits a given set of criteria, for example, 'How can we tell this is an X?'
- Define compound words
- Justify why something was done
- Solve a problem which requires reasoning skills and not just working out, for example, mathematical application

Science



Level 1

- Name equipment
- Find equipment by name
- Match pieces of equipment with others that have the same function

Level 2

- Identify by properties or attributes, for example, 'Which material is flexible or rigid?', 'which is acid or alkali?', or 'which is a conductor or insulator?'
- Categorise items, for example, 'Yes, a whale is a mammal, what other mammal can you think of?' (or reptiles, combustible materials etc)
- Identify items by a description of their function, for example, 'What pumps blood in the body?', 'Which could you use to make clothes?', 'what is used to heat up the contents of a test tube?'. Try this first where the items or pictures of the items are in front of the pupil; in later lessons, try this where the items are not visible.
- Describe what is happening, for example, 'What happens to the shadow?'

Level 3

- Recount, in sequence, the steps taken in an investigation or experiment. The task will be easier if the young person has the materials in front of them to give a visual reminder. Initially support the young person either by:
 -
 - supplying the information (sequence strips of photos) for the young person to correctly organise or
 - giving alternatives, for example, 'Did you do X or Y next' or
 - giving a prompt, for example, 'What happened after you did X?' for each step.

- Name something that's in the category but has an exception, for example, 'Which bird can't fly?', or an organ of the body that is not internal, a gas that is not toxic on inhalation etc
- Name something that does not fit the category, for example, 'Which of these materials is rigid but not transparent?'
- Predict the outcome of the investigation. This prediction must be obvious, for example, 'This slope has a rough surface. How fast will the car go?'
- Define words and technical terms, for example, 'What does transparent mean?'

Level 4

- Justify a prediction made at Level 3, for example, 'Why will X happen?' or 'Why did Y happen?', and what is the evidence
- Present a solution to a possible problem, for example, 'The soil is really dry, what should we do?' or what could be done if the experiment is unsuccessful or doesn't bring the expected result?
- Justify why a certain course of action has been taken, for example, 'Why did we use equipment X rather than equipment Y?'
- Make a judgement, for example, 'How do you know X happened?', 'how do you know that a chemical reaction has taken place, that no further reaction will take place etc

Design and Technology



Level 1

- Name equipment
- Find the ruler
- Match one tool with another that has the same function

Level 2

- Identify items by a description of their function – try this where the equipment is in front of the pupil, in later lessons try this where the things are not visible
- Categorise items of equipment, for example, that cut, stick, clamp, or secure materials
- Give another example within the category, for example, other things that could be used to cut a particular kind of material

Level 3

- Recount the steps taken to make something. The task will be easier if the young person has the materials in front of them to give a visual reminder. Initially support the young person, either by:
 - supplying photos for the young person to correctly organise, or
 - giving alternatives, for example, 'did you do X or Y next?' or a prompt 'what happened after you did X?' for each step
- Name something that is in the category, but has an exception, for example, 'a tool that cuts but doesn't have two blades'
- Name something that is not in the category
- Predict the outcome
- Define words and technical terms

Level 4

- Present a solution to a possible problem – perhaps a difficulty in construction, or how could X be improved?
- Justify why a certain course of action has been taken, for example, 'why should we join these materials with X rather than Y?'

Geography



Level 1

- Name items, real or pictures etc
- Find named items
- Find matching items, for example, 'find another sign-post or contour line like this one'

Level 2

- Identify by properties or attributes, for example, 'look at the map and show me a red/ or yellow road', 'how is a church drawn on a map?' or hilly vs flat, high vs low rainfall or temperatures
- Categorise items, for example, 'find all the rivers, write down their names', 'what do you think these brown shapes are?', list rivers or countries that are part of Europe
- Explain what is happening, for example, 'what is happening?', or 'what can you see in the picture?'
- Identify what other items might fit the same category, for example, 'what other colours are used to show a road?', other mountainous regions or areas with similar rainfall level

Level 3

- Name something that's in the category, but has an exception, for example, 'which church is not in a village?', mountain ranges not in Europe or not above 15,000ft
- Name something that does not fit the category, e.g. 'which of these coloured lines does not represent a road?'
- Recount, in sequence, anything that is a step-by-step event, for example, 'which roads would you walk along to get from the post-office to the school?', cloud formation or rainfall, rock formation etc. The task will be easier if the young person has the materials or pictures in front of them to give a visual

reminder and support the organisation of thought. Initially support the young person either by:

- - supplying the information (sentence strips or photos) for them to correctly organise, or
 - giving alternatives (for example, 'does X or Y happen next?') or a prompt (e.g. 'what happens after X?') for each step
- Predict the outcome of a course of action, for example, 'if the river floods which house will get wet?', deforestation etc
- Define words and technical terms, for example, 'what are flood defences?'

Level 4

- Justify the prediction made at Level 3, for example, 'why do you think X will happen?', and what is the evidence?
- Present a solution to a possible problem, for example, 'what could they do to stop the flooding?', what could they do to prevent the problems caused by deforestation or water pollution
- Justify why a certain course of action has been taken or is best, for example, 'why is it a good idea not to build houses on the flat areas by the river?'
- Make a judgement – how does the young person know something, for example, 'how do you know that this house on the map is on a hill?', 'how do you find the age of a rock formation or climate of a region or prosperity of a region'

History



Level 1

- Name items, real or pictures etc
- Find named items
- Find matching items

Level 2

- Answer 'who', 'what', 'where' questions about information that has just been given, shown or read. This requires recall.
- Identify by properties or attributes, for example, 'which picture shows wealth or poverty or peace or wartime?', 'show me the big ship'
- Categorise examples, for example, recall causes of X event, what were the 3 main aims of X?
- Give another example

Level 3

- Summarise information
- Retell a short sequence of a historical event – it's much easier for the young person to give a recount immediately after hearing it (gradually increase the time lag between hearing and recounting the events)
- Identify what a historical figure might have thought or said about a situation
- Identify how people might have felt in a situation, for example, pupilren in a Victorian school, holocaust victims
- Make a simple prediction about what might have happened next. For some this will be extremely hard, support them by:
 - - Retelling the sequence of events so far
 - Highlighting the critical elements of the event
 - Link the event to the young person's personal experience

- Define words, for example, 'what does 'aggressor' mean?', hyperinflation, propaganda, dictator etc

Level 4

- Inference – 'how can we tell that this miner has done a hard day of work?', 'what does this cartoon tell you about the attitudes to X?', 'how far does the photo support Y statement?'. Again, the young person may need support in identifying the critical information in order for an inference to be made.
- Justify the prediction made at level 3, for example, 'why do you think that X happened?'
- Justify the action of historical figures or populations, for example, 'why did X do Y?'
- Solve a problem, for example, 'if X happened, what do you think Y did?'. If possible, apply the situation to the young person's own personal experience.