

Use of questions as a tool in coaching

Controlling versus neutral questions

An example of both a controlling and a neutral question is given in the table below, together with a comment about the negative or positive effects on coaching that the question is likely to have.

Your task is to consider the questions below and fit them into the table together with the relevant effect.

Controlling questions	Problem/issue	Neutral questions	Benefit
You must have felt disappointed by the pupils' answers here, were you?	Narrows down options of what the teacher may have felt, and assumes they 'should' have felt disappointed.	What did you learn from the pupils' responses here?	Open question enables the teacher to diagnose a situation, e.g. relating to pupils' understanding or their skills in providing answers.

Place the following questions into the appropriate cells above, under the headings in the table above.

Questions

You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. How well did your change of plan work?
You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. Why didn't you do it?

What made you ask that question then?
How did the pupils respond to that question?

What could you do to make sure they all understand the objectives next time?
What might help pupils better understand the objectives next time?

What are the important things about giving helpful feedback?
What is it about giving helpful feedback that you're finding difficult?

Effects (issues or benefits)

Implies both criticism and a requirement for the teacher to justify their actions.
Invites the teacher to identify both positive and negative outcomes.

Concentrates on the impact on learning rather than the actions of the teacher.
Implies disagreement and requests justification.

Places pressure on the teacher to get the question 'right' while implying subtle blame.
Allows the teacher to consider various ways of sharing the objectives.

Encourages the teacher to reflect back on training and to apply it.
Assumes the teacher has a fault in their teaching.

Controlling versus neutral questions: suggested solutions

Controlling questions	Problem/issue	Neutral questions	Benefit
You must have felt disappointed by the pupils' answers here, were you?	Narrows down options of what the teacher may have felt, and assumes they 'should' have felt disappointed.	What did you learn from the pupils' responses here?	Open question enables the teacher to diagnose a situation, e.g. relating to pupils' understanding or their skills in providing answers.
You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. Why didn't you do it?	Implies both criticism and a requirement for the teacher to justify their actions.	You planned to give pupils 30 seconds to talk. How well did your change of plan work?	Invites the teacher to identify both positive and negative outcomes.
What made you ask that question then?	Implies disagreement and requests justification.	How did the pupils respond to that question?	Concentrates on the impact on learning rather than the actions of the teacher.
What could you do to make sure they all understand the objectives next time?	Places pressure on the teacher to get the question 'right' while implying subtle blame.	What might help pupils better understand the objectives next time?	Allows the teacher to consider various ways of sharing the objectives.
What is it about giving helpful feedback that you're finding difficult?	Assumes the teacher has a fault in their teaching.	What are the important things about giving helpful feedback?	Encourages the teacher to reflect back on training and to apply it.

Source:

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