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**Sincerely,
Karen Haag**

QUESTIONING the AUTHOR

Students benefit from using a *Questioning the Author* lesson format. That's because students stop at preplanned points to monitor their comprehension and talk as a group throughout the reading of the text - not just at the end. To me, the lesson is like a group think aloud. Students work the text together, stopping and thinking, stopping and thinking with a teacher to guide them. They learn how to monitor their comprehension and explain their thinking route. The steps work well with reluctant readers because they look for the pitfalls of the text. Talking about the author and the craft of writing is less threatening than admitting to not understanding. Readers discuss where they get confused by the way the author wrote (or the way they interpreted the words) and work to find the meaning of what the author meant. It's also less threatening because the teacher reads aloud to the students and then gradually turns the reading over to them. At that point, they read silently.

Question the Author Planning Steps

- The teacher selects a text to teach students a skill or strategy.
- Teacher selects a group of mixed ability or ability grouped.
- The teacher reads the text ahead of time. She decides at what points to stop and think to give the students the chance to (1) use the skill or strategy, or (2) monitor their personal understanding of the text. She plans what queries she will ask. (See below.)
- Teacher pre-selects vocabulary to introduce before reading based on TWO criteria: (1) words students can't use strategies to figure out and (2) are critical to understanding.
- To start, (1) the teacher reads aloud to the predetermined points or (2) the students read to the predetermined points silently. (See sample lesson plan page 5.)

Tips & Notes

- Students & teacher ask questions at "Stop and Think" time. Teacher is a participant and a facilitator in these groups - asking questions she doesn't know and teaching students how to talk to one another about books.
- Eventually, students learn from the modeling to monitor their comprehension on their own. The teacher hands responsibility for reading independently to them when ready.
- Teacher and students do not read every chapter this way. Teacher selects chapters to read and discuss with students to model or assess their ability to use skills and strategies on their own. Students read intervening chapters on their own as a part of their "seat work" time.

Queries Vs. Questions

The authors introduce a new word that I like: *queries*. Queries are open-ended. The teacher plans some ahead of time, just like she would in a Socratic Seminar. The teacher is also open to queries that students pose in the course of the reading. A query is designed to make students think, not simply retrieve information. I know I've asked a query when my students use a lot of words to explain their answer. Through the discussion, the teacher shows students how to jump into the text and make sense of it using all the reading strategies. The authors suggest different queries for opening and closing the discussion and for nonfiction and fiction texts.

"How do you get students to become actively involved as they read, to dive into difficult information and exert real mental energy to make sense of it?" p.30

Questions	Queries
Assess student comprehension of text, information after the fact	Assist students with developing the meaning of text while reading
Focus on student to teacher interaction which generates individual responses	Facilitates group discussion about an author's ideas and encourages student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions

Beck & McKeown

"...the kinds of questions we ask can either contribute to engagement with ideas or erode engagement." page 41

Discussions

Question-Driven	Query-driven
Brief answers	Longer, more elaborate answers
In author's language	In student's language
Questions are teacher-initiated	Some questions are student-initiated
Product oriented	Process oriented
Student responses are characterized by unrelated bits of information	Students responses are part of ongoing connected discussion

Beck & McKeown

Beginning Queries

- Have you read anything by this author before?
- What are you reading to find out?
- What is the author trying to say here?
- What do you think the author wants us to know?
- What is the author talking about?
- What do you notice?
- What are you wondering?
- What do you predict will happen?
- What do you think you know before you even begin reading?

Nonfiction Queries

- So, what does the author mean right here?
- That's what the author said, but what does the author mean?
- Does that make sense with what the author told us before?
- How does that fit with what the author told us?
- Does the author tell us why?
- Why do you think the author tells us that now?

Narrative Queries "Narrative texts require additional queries because of their authors' use of **literary techniques** that can pose special challenges for the readers." p. 56

- How do things look for this character now?
- Given what the author has already told us about this character, what do you think he's up to?
- How has the author let you know that something has changed?
- How has the author worked that out for us?
- How is the author making you feel right now about these characters?
- What is the author telling us with this conversation?

Follow-up Queries

- So, were we right?
- How has the character changed?
- What is the theme? Main idea? What is the author's message?
- What questions do you still have?
- What questions will remain unanswered?
- Does the author tell us why?
- How does the author make you feel?
- Is the ending satisfying?
- Why did the author write the book the way s/he did?

Teacher Language (Discussion Moves) based on Beck and McKeown with some Karen Haag thrown in. The authors suggest that teachers learn and use "discussion moves" to keep the conversation moving and to teach students how to talk about books. This list is a combination of moves to help students deepen their understanding of the text and curriculum by practicing discussion.

1. **Mark.** Name what's happening in the group. Name the strategies students use and the ones they need to work on, the social skills they exhibit, and the social skills they need to work on.
2. **Annotate.** Fill in background information when it's obvious kids don't have it but need it in order to function. Control the dictionary. Look up words while students move on.
3. **Recap.** Summarize what has happened so far. Then, move the group to the next question. This move is used when the conversation wanes or when people start repeating themselves.
4. **Revoice.** Relate seemingly unrelated comments to the conversation by explaining how the comment connects or by asking the student to explain how it relates.
5. **Connect.** Point out concepts that emerge in conversation and relate them to your reading, writing or inquiry curriculum. Point out ideas you see that your students may not. These are teaching points.
6. **Model.** Ask questions you truly don't understand and need to discuss.
7. **Reference the Text.** Ask students for evidence to support their comments.
8. **Reference Other Students.** Encourage students to talk to one another, answer each other's questions, and say that their questions either did or did not get answered. Refer students to other students in the group who can provide background information or text information.
9. **Record and/or Assess.** Record questions that need further discussion or research. Assess student progress (Star Chart, anecdotal notes, Response Checklist, etc.).
10. **Facilitate.** Teach students to use discussion social skills.

A summary of Kathleen and Eric Mohr's queries that move us away from teacher-dominated discussions:

Kathleen and Eric Mohr, Extending English-language learners' classroom interactions using the Response Protocol, *The Reading Teacher*, Volume 6, No. 5, February 2007. (K Mohr teaches at the University of North Texas.)

"Teacher talk dominates classroom communication ... teachers dominate 76% of classroom talk. (Edwards and Merver, 1987)... explanations, questions, commands, modeling, feedback (Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, Merino, 1986)... 60% of teacher talk involved questions, primarily display questions, which expect students to recall information taught previously by the teacher (Forestal, 1990)... the number of questions asked by the teacher in the study at almost 100 per hour (Mohr, 1998). " (Page 441)

"Therefore the preponderance of teacher talk and the teacher's use of questions continue as factors in how much classroom talk time is share with students; both the quantity and the quality of such interaction deserve scrutiny."

Asking and answering questions are typical interactions and expected in most classrooms (Weber & Longhi-Chirlin, 2001)

1. **Initiation-Response:** expect one right answer --- may not be supportive of ELL children, if child can't get the one answer, child may not be able to say the words she needs, rather than praising or evaluating, the teacher should give feedback: clarify, connect, elaborate --- between teacher and student and between students
2. **Exploratory talk:** not looking for one answer --- affirms student --- must pay attention to who speaks and what kind of responses children receive=
3. **Instructional Conversation:** high level of participation, teacher connects student's comments to academic contexts --- talking and thinking go together, realizes that what the child says is not the limit of what she knows.

Examples of teacher elaborations to right responses:

You're right! Can you tell me more?
Yes, that's good. What else do you know about that?
You are correct. Now, how did you learn that?
Yes, that's a very good answer. Can you tell me why (-) is important?
I like that good thinking, and I like the way you said that.
Good thinking! Good English!

Examples of teacher elaborations of partially correct responses:

Thank you. Can you tell me more about that?
Yes, I agree that (---). Now, let's think more about (--). You're telling me some good things, especially the part about (----) What else?
We're heading in the right direction, but that's not quite complete. Do you or anyone else have something to add?

Examples of teacher elaborations of responses in a language other than English:

All right. That sounds interesting to me. How can we say that in English? (Wait and model conventional English.)
Do you know any words in English to help you say that?
Call on someone to help us say that in English.
Can you help us translate that to English? (Repeat the question; call on more than one student; and then model an appropriate response in English.)

Examples of teacher elaborations of responses to student questions:

Thank you for asking. Understanding is important. Good learners ask lots of questions.
Thank you for asking that question. Questions can help us all be better learners.
Wow! That is a great (important) question. Do you know anything that will help you answer that question?
I am glad you asked that question. How can the rest of us answer your question?
Let me first answer you question and then I will ask my question again.
Do you want to call on another student to answer your question? Do you want one of your classmates to help you?

Examples of teacher elaborations of responses that are incorrect or confusing

Help me understand what you mean. Tell me again. Tell me more so I know what you're thinking.
I want to know what you're thinking. Can you tell me more?
You said (---). But, I thought (---). Please, help me understand.
Do you think (---) or (---)? (Explain a right answer to one of these options.)

Examples of teacher elaborations in response to student silence:

I think you know something about this, and I would like to hear what you have to say.
Can you show us what you know by acting it out or drawing?
I'm going to come back to you and ask again. Please get ready to talk with us.
I want to hear from you in this lesson. Get ready with an answer or a question.
I expect you to know this/to have something to say. Let me know when you're ready. (Provide a yes or no question or an either/or choice.)

SAMPLE QUESTIONING THE AUTHOR LESSON PLAN for Chapter 2 of *Caleb's Story*

Karen Haag's Interpretation

Overview or Review – Choose one:

1. Read from daybooks from yesterday – what's working, what needs work?
2. Review what's happened in the story so far.
3. Students write a headline summary of what's happened so far in their daybooks.
4. Set a purpose for reading: *who is the man who showed up in the first chapter?*

Connect

Do you drink coffee? (Just wondering because the author talks an awful lot about drinking coffee and was wondering how much kids know about that.)

Vocabulary

Students will probably be able to read these 5 words, but the words are used in a different way than I think these learners have seen before. These are good choices to introduce before students read. There are many other words they don't know but I want readers to (1) use all their fix-up strategies to figure them, or (2) ask about the words when it's stop and think time.

looked alarmed (not a phrase we really use), very faintly I heard, voice sounded ragged, sharp tone, confusion in her voice --- WHAT ARE YOU READING TO FIND OUT?

Review characters so far – Sarah, Caleb, Cassie, Lottie, Nick, Papa, and Jacob

Minilesson

I will explain stop and think reading – *Question the Author* is a way of showing you how to do that – we'll go slowly today and I will guide them – eventually I want them to read and think automatically.

Reading the text in sections

- The morning... Read the 1st 2 sentences: what are you thinking so far? (Good idea to stop in the very beginning - right after the lead.)
- P.31 – Read to “he took care of my horse yesterday” How would you describe how you're visualizing this scene so far? Anything out of the ordinary?
- Read the next sentence: “He sat down suddenly, his face pale.” What is your brain thinking now? (Should be on the lookout for something to happen. Authors never do things randomly. They do them on purpose: rain, dark = evil, he's pale = something's going wrong. Look for those clues.)
- Read, “I wondered if John would tell her about the pills?” What do you think? Advantages?
- Disadvantages? Does your mind work this way when you read? (Inferring)
- Read to “ah the queen,” page 32. What are you thinking now? (Fix up)
- Read to “the dog sat up suddenly,” page 32? What are you thinking now? How do you know? (Connections)
- Read to “is there school – snow drifted pretty deep,” page 33. What are you thinking now? (Inferring)
- Read to “a long time ago,” page 34, top (Can you infer? Enough clues? Read on!)

Follow Up: Students read to end of the chapter and write reflection.

Reflection: What did you learn about *how to read* today?

Read *Questioning The Author* by Beck and McKeown for a fuller understanding of the format.