Blank's Levels of Questioning

Blank's Levels of Questioning is a questioning framework developed by Marion Blank, a renowned psychologist. There are four 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 (Blank, 2000).

Keywords: *Blanks levels of questions, questioning, comprehension, higher-order language*

Blank's Levels of Questions - Level 1: Matching Perception

- Focus is on objects in the student's immediate environment and requires concrete thinking.
- Responses can be short or nonverbal (e.g. pointing).
- Understanding of these questions develop around 3 years of age.

Level 1 question examples:

- Find one like this. (Matching objects)
- What can you hear?
- What did you touch?
- What is this? (Pointing to object)
- Who is this?   (Pointing to person)
- What is _____ doing?
- Say this "___" (Imitation)
- What did you see? (Remembering items in books)

Blank's Levels of Questions - Level 2: Selective Analysis of Perception

- Questions about details of objects known to student but are not necessarily visible at time of questioning.
- Involves analysis such as grouping objects, describing and understanding object functions.
- Understanding of these questions develop around 4 years of age.

Level 2 question examples:

- What happened?
- Who/what/where is ____? (Remembering information)
- Describe characteristics of objects:
    - E.g. What size/shape/colour is it? How does it taste/smell/feel?
- Identifying object functions:
    - E.g. Show me the one we use for _____.
- How are these different?
- Tell me something that is a type of _____. (Naming object from category)

Blank's Levels of Questions - Level 3: Reordering Perception

- Questions are not about direct objects.
- The answers require listeners to use their own knowledge and higher order thinking. It requires listener to make basic predictions, assume the role of another or make generalisations.
- Understanding of these questions develop around <u>4 ½ years of age</u>.

Level 3 question examples:

- What will happen next?
- What is a _____? (Definition)
- Find one to use with this.
- Find the things that are not _____.
- What could he say? (Assuming the role of another person)
- How are these the same? (Identifying similarities)

Blank's Levels of Questions - Level 4: Reasoning about perception

- Questions are not about direct objects.
- The answer requires listeners to use reasoning and draw on past experiences. It requires the listener to problem solve, predict, and provide explanations.
- Understanding of these questions develop around <u>5 years of age</u>.

Level 4 question examples:

- What will happen if ____? (Predicting)
- Why did _____? (Justifying cause of event)
- What could ____ do/use? (Solution)
- Why could _____ do that/use that? (Explaining means to goal)
- Why can't we _____? (Explaining obstacle to solution)
- How can we tell _____? (Explaining observation)
- Why is _____ made of _____? (Explaining construction of objects)

(Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978)

How can Blank's Levels of Questions be Used in the Classroom?

In the classroom, Blank's levels of questioning can be used in many ways including:

- As a tool to support comprehension

- To ensure questions are appropriately challenging for students

- To support comprehension of a topic during class-level, small group or one-on-one conversations

- To support comprehension when reading a book

- To create a shared context in whole-class or small-group activities

- To supporting students in achieving success in a range of subject areas

Strategies for Practicing Higher Levels of Blank's Levels of Questioning

- Ensure questions are of a suitable difficulty for the listener. Trial questions starting from Blank's level 1 and if the student is successful, progress to level two etc. When students have difficulty responding to Blank's questions at a certain level, this may level may be a suitable target for them.

- Utilise visual supports to aid understanding such as pictures or diagrams.

- Allow sufficient time (10 seconds +) for student to think through and provide an answer.

- Repeat the question for the listener if required.

- Simplify the question by breaking it down into parts or presenting lower level questions to prompt higher level answers. For example, "How are a cow and a dog the same?" → "What group does a cow belong to?" (animal) → "What group does a dog belong to?" (animal) → "So how are they the same?" (they are animals).

- Focus on important features in the question (e.g. if asked how two items are the same, you can draw their attention to similarities).

- Provide first sound or syllable of the answer.

- Provide sentence completion cue (e.g. What animal is this? It is a _____).

- Explicitly break down how to answer higher level questions.

- Relate known to unknown by relating answers back to student's previous experiences (e.g. The tea is hot. How will it feel after some time? Remember what happens when we leave hot water out for some time? How did it feel?).

- Provide a model of how to answer higher level questions by verbalising your own thought process when answering questions.

- Reinforce that questions can have many correct answers.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please contact Speech and Language Development Australia (SALDA). SALDA provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or hello@salda.org.au
Website: www.salda.org.au
Facebook: www.facebook.com/SALDAAustralia

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