

Title: From teacher-led interrogation to student-led dialogic inquiry: Elevating comprehension and critical thinking through student questioning

Abstract

Question asking in lessons is typically the province of the teacher. The virtue of promoting student questioning as a pedagogical resource remains underexamined. This paper seeks to advance the dialogic turn by repositioning student questioning as an important resource for comprehending texts and talk. Drawing on research investigating dialogic pedagogies in primary literacy lessons, close examination of student-initiated questions in whole class and group discussions reveals how student questions form important indicators of meaning making.

Conversation analysis of (i) student-initiated questions, and (ii) student-led questioning sequences reveal how questioning functions as an essential meaning-making resource. Empirical examples show that *student-initiated questioning* serves as a powerful indicator of comprehension, where the act of formulating a question requires learners to actively process information, identify what they understand, and articulate where further clarity is needed. Analysis shows students display thinking by initiating three types of questions:

1. *Clarifying* – showing that students are monitoring understandings by identifying confusion or gaps in meaning,
2. *Interpretive* - indicating emerging understandings as students move beyond surface details to make connections, test ideas, and refine interpretations, and
3. *Extension/critical* - demonstrating deeper understanding by linking new concepts to prior knowledge, applying ideas in new contexts, integrating ideas into more sophisticated understandings, and exploring implications.

Student-led questioning sequences were found to sustain inquiry-oriented dialogues, where i) meanings are jointly and actively constructed, ii) metacognition and conceptual understandings are deepened, and iii) student agency is promoted, where students come to see themselves as legitimate contributors to knowledge-building, which, in turn, strengthens engagement. It is concluded that student questioning is both an indicator and a driver of comprehension.

Implications centre on elevating student questioning as a shared, generative resource. For teachers, meaningful pedagogical shifts are necessary, requiring sustained, long-term commitment to interaction practices that normalise and scaffold student-led question-asking.