

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrages

Morgan, N. & Saxton, J. (2006). *Asking better questions*. Makhma, ON: Pembroke Publishers. 158 pages.

Sabrina Sharpe, Resource/Special Education Teacher, Westisle Composite High School, PEI

One of the most vital ways to guarantee that classroom discussion is continually occurring is to ensure to ask questions that are not only thought provoking, but that keep students interested in the topic at hand and allow for more discussion to occur. Most teachers have had a wonderful lesson planned out full of questions in which the teacher starts the lesson and asks the first question, only to have a student shout out an answer that corresponds to the tenth question that the teacher was going to ask. Teachers can be insecure about asking questions due to the fact that it can be hard to know what constitutes a good question and how to ask questions that will garner the responses that the teacher wants to elicit.

According to Morgan and Saxton, teachers tend to focus on two domains of the educational process: the Cognitive Domain, which is what the student thinks and knows, and the Psychomotor Domain, which is what the student does as a result of his knowledge, thoughts, and feelings. The third domain, the Affective Domain, is mostly forgotten about as this domain focuses on what the student feels about what he thinks and knows. Teachers focus on the cognitive and psychomotor domains for one reason: assessment. One can measure what a student thinks and knows about a topic, as well as what the student may do as a result of the knowledge. It is harder to measure personal thoughts and feelings. By forgetting about the Affective Domain, students are not experiencing the opportunity to question how they feel about a topic. For example, a teacher can plan a lesson around renewable energy where students study different kinds of renewable energy and answer questions about what the student knows and then advance this knowledge further as to what the student can do to help bring renewable energy to their province. A teacher never has to ask how any student in the classroom feels about the different kinds of renewable energy and the students never get to fully investigate their feelings concerning the various kinds of renewable energy the student may want to bring to their province.

According to Morgan and Saxton, there are six levels of questions that teachers ask in the classroom: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. As mentioned above, teachers can spend considerable time planning a lesson only to have the first question the teacher asks answer the last question the teacher had planned to ask. This scenario occurs due to the fact that the knowledge question that had been asked could actually have been reworded as an evaluation question. This would still have led to a discussion that would have answered each level of question without the need to ask six questions. Teachers feel the need to start at the knowledge questions and work up to the evaluation questions, where in many cases it is not necessary. The one evaluation question would create as much, if not more discussion, than

six questions and allow for whole classroom discussion to occur more quickly. Some teachers tend to ask the lower level questions because they feel safer asking those questions. By asking those lower level questions, one may never have a classroom that could be considered as noisy or out of control.

Asking Better Questions was written in such a way that it is user friendly and also allows for the reader to leaf through the book and start reading at any point. The book is divided into three sections that end with a sample lesson to demonstrate the material covered in the preceding chapters. The sample lessons are a wonderful addition to the book. Not only does the lesson reinforce the material that had been discussed, but the lesson allows the reader to experience how a teacher could use the material in a classroom. Another great feature is that the sample lessons cover a variety of subject areas. The reader is shown how the material can be used not only in a language arts classroom, but also in a science or mathematics classroom.

Along with discussing the six levels of questions, Morgan and Saxton also provide a glossary for the many types of questions that teachers ask in their classrooms. As a teacher, this glossary was useful in terms of reading a certain type of question, looking at the definition, and also realizing where in a lesson the question would be the most useful. Where some questions lead students into discovering an answer for him or herself, another question can be used to help gain control in the classroom after the discussion strayed into an area that extends farther than the material being discussed. Having the understanding that there are types of questions that can be useful to a teacher in any situation allows a teacher to go beyond the typical questions to further challenge their students.

Along with asking questions, teachers must also respond to the answers that students have given. Morgan and Saxton included a section entitled "Responding to answers: Some things to avoid." Although many of the suggestions given by Morgan and Saxton reflect good teaching practices, it was to the benefit of the reader that the suggestions were included. The section allows the reader to have a reminder to, for example, avoid asking questions that students could not possibly know the answer to or to counter question a question that a student has just asked you. Having these reminders, along with asking the proper questions, allows a teacher to provide a nourishing environment for learning.

Morgan and Saxton provide several response forms that teachers can provide to students to make up their own questions surrounding any given topic as well as a response form to complete about the types of questions that the student has been asking in the classroom. Morgan and Saxton also provide a form for teachers that allows them to begin thinking about a unit of study and the types of questions and assessment the teacher may create surrounding that unit.

Asking Better Questions is an excellent book that allows teachers to reflect on their past classroom practices and provides the tools for teachers to change their classroom into a learning environment for all present.