The importance of questioning

By Claire Stoneman

Muijs and Reynolds tell us that due to its importance, questioning is one of the most widely studied elements in teaching research. Questioning is a crucial element of effective instruction and can be used throughout the lesson. For example, it may be used during retrieval practice which might occur at the beginning of a lesson.Questioning can also be used during an explanation or during modelling to gauge whether information has been understood. Questioning is a vital and flexible tool at any part of a lesson. Questioning is essential to great teaching and should be interactive and responsive. Sherrington provides what he calls the 'Relevant instructional procedures of questioning'. They are:

1. Ask a large number of questions and check for understanding
2. Ask students to explain what they have learned
3. Check the response of all students
4. Provide systematic feedback and corrections

So questioning helps us do a lot. It's essential to be a good questioner as a teacher and again it needs lots and lots of practice. Our questions can help us gauge many things, from how well the pupils understand, to whether we need to reteach something, to whether pupils have understood a complex concept. We need to ask loads of questions and involve loads of pupils. We may need to take more time near lesson to explain something further if our questioning has shown us that pupils don't really get it. Questioning enables us to be responsive teachers and to act on the information we glean from our pupils. Questioning is really key and as Rosenshine found less successful teachers ask fewer questions and almost no process questions. There's an array of questioning strategies that you can employ in your teaching. It's worth focusing on a few and practicing them until you're more comfortable and they come more naturally. Practice is key.

In this session you'll explore how to check pupils' understanding by asking pupils a number of different questions and gaining feedback about what they understand. As Rosenshine and Sherrington emphasize this reinforces the need to present material in small steps. If there's too much at once then errors and misconceptions will potentially occur more frequently. Therefore chunked explanations supported by models and reinforced by regular questioning and checking for understanding is vital.