

Do not complete pupils' answers

By Robert Gardner

Teacher questioning is a powerful tool in the classroom. One of the key aims of teacher questioning is creating a sense of accountability for all pupils and generating a learning environment that is high challenge for all pupils regardless of ability. Probing for more detail can help us achieve this goal.

This is about us, as teachers, having high expectations of the answers that pupils give in response to our questioning. We don't accept half formed or inaccurate answers: we push for the best possible answer.

We can do this in a number of ways:

- through further probing
- by using wait time effectively, giving the pupil a moment to rearticulate their response and repeat their improved answer
- by questioning other members of the class and then asking the original pupil again. This gives them time to listen, reflect and refine their answer.

In a recent lesson on Macbeth, we were doing some close analysis of a quotation. A pupil that I questioned gave a partially correct answer about a crucial plot event in the play. They indicated that Lady Macbeth, "Puts the blame on someone else for what Macbeth did" (in terms of Duncan's murder). I wanted a fuller and more detailed answer than this. I asked the pupil to reread a speech by Lady Macbeth where this plot detail is covered and then unpicked the key parts of the speech with the pupil through further questioning, by asking questions like:

- "What did Lady Macbeth do with the bloody daggers?"
- "Why did she do this?"
- "What was the impact of these actions after Duncan's body was discovered?"

After this probing questioning, I then returned to the key question of who Lady Macbeth intentionally frames for Duncan's murder. This probing ensured that we eventually got to the full answer.

As teachers, we might be tempted to accept poorly formed answers, or even inaccurate answers to appear encouraging to pupils or to avoid disrupting the pace or flow of a lesson. However, we can't allow misconceptions or errors to become embedded – that is the danger if we don't insist on challenging incorrect or partially formed answers.