

Supporting / Seeking to Understand



Why?

Perhaps my first commandment of dialogue would be 'be interested'! If someone is struggling to articulate an idea or if we are struggling to understand what someone is saying, then it's essential to take the time to seek to understand. Without this disposition it will be difficult to build a **caring** and **collaborative** community of enquiry. Sometimes we rush to agree or disagree with a position before we fully understand it – sometimes it's helpful to suspend judgement and give ourselves time to get to know 'the other'.

Useful Questions for Facilitation

- Can anyone help us... (to articulate this idea)?
- Could that be explained that in a different way?
- X, could you say more about...?
- Is there a question we could ask X...?
- Can I just check, X – are you saying...?
- Could X give us an example of...?
- Could I ask X to repeat that...?
- X, could you summarise / give us the headlines of what you said...?
- X, what do you mean by...?

Relevant Moves of Facilitation

Give people time to think after a challenging question / idea has been shared.

Show that you appreciate that some thoughts are difficult to articulate / take time to form. Give people time to speak.

Ask someone who if they would like you to come back to them after they have had a little more thinking time.

Ask people to hold an object while they are speaking. As long as they are holding the object they have not finished and should not be interrupted.

Ask people to refrain from indicating that they want to speak until the previous speaker is finished and what they have said has been considered.

Use questions / encourage students to use questions like those above to encourage clarification / elaboration.

Example of a Skills Builder

Follow-on Questions

Give pupils some examples of questions and responses, like the ones shown below. Explain that a person's first answer to a question doesn't often fully explain their thinking. What follow-up questions could they ask to encourage each named person to elaborate?

It's important to note the intention here is to better understand, not to problematise. For example, a follow on question to Annie might be 'Can you give us an example of how she was nice?' rather than 'So is anyone who is nice to you your friend?'

Q: Why do say that your action wasn't brave, Joe?

A: I had to do it.

Q: How do you know she was your friend, Annie?

A: I'm not sure - she was nice sometimes.

Q: Are organs alive, Ashraf?

A: Well they are and they aren't.

Q: What does it mean to be fair, Dionne?

A: To give people what they need I suppose – like, you know...

Q: Why did he volunteer to help, James?

A: Because he's a Christian I suppose.

Q: Why did they treat her so badly, Zaynab?

A: She wasn't like them.

Q: Why would you rather be a little fish than a big fish, Josie?

A: They hide.

Q: So why isn't the elephant's painting art, Jack?

A: He just, well, moved the brush.

An extension of this skills builder might work as follows:

- Seat the group in a circle with an empty chair facing you
- Make a statement (I like football, for example)
- Invite people to come and sit in the empty chair and ask you a question about the statement (the first question might be 'Why do you like football?')
- Give a limited response 'Because I watched it as a child', for example
- Invite someone else to come and ask you a follow-on question
- Keep going until the group have a full understanding of your liking for the sport!
- Another student may then wish to take your place and make his or her own statement

Perhaps this could be used as a move during an enquiry when you feel that an interesting statement is worthy of a full exploration. It might also be used in the wider curriculum to fully explore somebodies stance on a particular issue.