



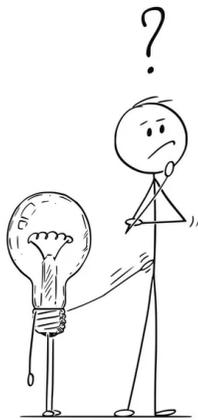
**ANGELA RUSS –AYON**

## **OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

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**ASKING OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS** is one of the best ways to enhance children's curiosity and guide them through the learning process without telling them what to do. These questions encourage high-level thinking because there are many possible responses (Lee, 2010). Children's responses will reveal what they feel, think, and comprehend.



**OPEN-ENDED INQUIRY** encourages children to investigate further and participate in more diverse, deep, complex activities that build their knowledge. After a child has played with water, what activity will expand on their experience? How about asking questions about bubbles, transferring, measuring, squeezing sponges, or floating and sinking objects? These are ideas children may not come up with on their own.

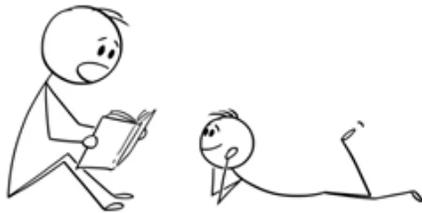
### **KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- Open-ended questions can be asked anytime to support instruction across all domains.
- Observe and actively listen. You will not know what to ask if you're not paying attention to what children are doing and saying.
- Show you care. Demonstrate that you are interested in the children's responses.
- Not all children will respond to questions vocally. Use hand gestures. Speak the language they are speaking and fill in with words and phrases.
- Open-ended questions help keep conversations flowing back and forth from adult to child and back again.
- Children require plenty of time to think about, process, and respond to questions.



- Consider how much goes into a child's response when asked a question, such as their maturity, cultural background, experiences, verbal and physical abilities, etc.

- Avoid bombarding children with question after question. You may not need to ask any questions at all.
- Select one question and wait to see what happens.
- The questions don't have to make sense, but they should be interesting.
- Ask questions that fit the moment or activity without distracting children from what they're doing or intruding on their thoughts.
- Do your homework. Research topics that are of interest to the children.



- Understand the makeup of children and their families.
- Build on what children already know or can already do. Ask questions that extend children's investigations.
- Introduce developmentally appropriate materials that are worth expanding upon and exploring.
- Rotate materials and props.
- Combine materials that typically would not be used together.
- Store and display materials in an inviting, organized manner.
- Be sure to ask "Why" questions with a smile because questions such as, "Why did you make it?" or "Why did you put it there?" can sound accusatory or critical.
- There is no perfect question, and there is no single right or wrong answer to correct, grade, applaud, or criticize.

- Acknowledge children's attempts at reasoning with encouragement instead of praise. Support them as they take the initiative.



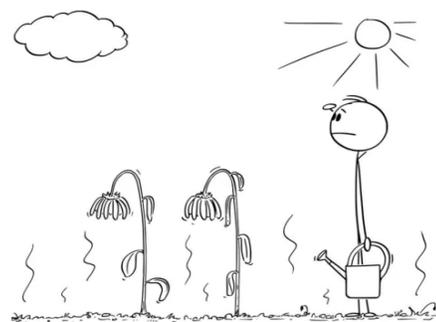
### ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS IN THOUGHT-PROVOKING WAYS:

#### ~ Ask for a prediction:

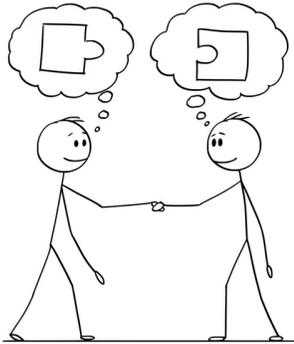
- *What do you think will happen if you pour sand into the strainer?*
- *What do you think will happen next in the story? Why do you think that will happen?*

#### ~ Ask for a solution:

- *How will you get your bike out of the mud?*
- *What do you think we can do to keep our classroom clean and organized?*
- *What can we do to make sure the plants in our classroom get enough water and sunlight?*



- *If we disagree about what game to play, how can we decide on a game that everyone will enjoy?*
- *How can we ensure that everyone has a friend to play with during recess?*

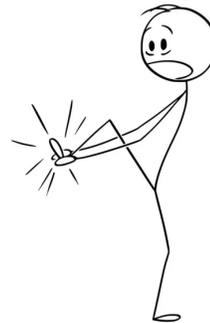


**~ Compare and Contrast:**

- *How do you know this is a letter and not a number?*
- *What's the difference between the shaker and the drum?*
- *Can you find two things in the room that look the same? How are they similar?*
- *How are your shoes similar to your friend's shoes, and how are they different?*

**~ Ask about consequences:**

- *If you break the tips off the markers, how will you color?*
- *How can we organize the crayons so we can find the colors we need next time?*
- *If the playground is wet and we can't play on it, what other fun activities can we do indoors?*



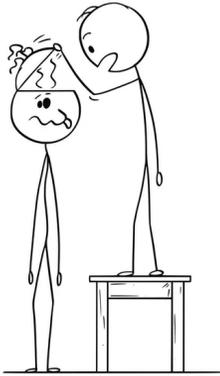
**~ Make real-life connections:**

- *What will happen if someone stands behind the swing when someone is swinging?*
- *What will happen if everyone yells while I read the book?*
- *What if we run out of time to play because we spent all our time arguing about what to do?*

- *Have you ever gotten hurt? What happened?*
- *Have you ever seen a real bridge? Tell us about it.*
- *What do you like to do first thing in the morning?*
- *Tell me about the things you do at home.*
- *How do you know how to make pancakes?*
- *How does the rain affect the clothes we wear?*

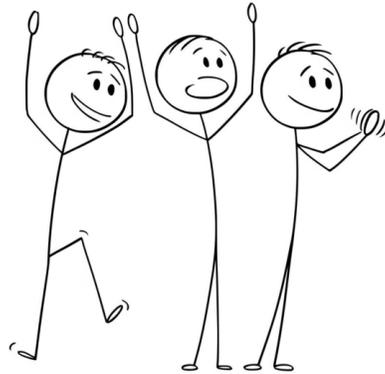
**~ Ask for an explanation:**

- How do you know this is a triangle and that's a square?
- How will the dog get out of your enclosure?
- How will you begin / finish?
- What did you do to make it work?
- Why do we wash our hands after using the restroom?



**~ Ask to recall:**

- What happened to the bear after he woke up?
- What was your favorite part of the day?
- What games did you play outside?
- What did you create during art time?
- Tell me about the story you heard during story time.



**~ Ask something nonsensical:**

- What if we all looked exactly the same?
- If you could have a pet rainbow, what color would it bark?
- If clouds were made of cotton candy, what flavor would you want them to be?
- If you could talk to a tree, what would it say?
- If you could eat a piece of the moon, how would it taste?

**~ Ask to consider feelings:**

- How do you feel when you play with your favorite toy?
- How do you feel when you spend time with your friends?
- How do you calm down and relax?
- What do you do when you're feeling angry or frustrated?
- How do you show people they are loved?

**LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

Ask questions that encourage language development: receptive and expressive. Children begin to use and understand complex vocabulary and the language of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) when adults inject positional and directional cues, concepts of time, STEM concepts and related terminology, and measurement words into everyday discussions. Here are a few examples:

- What do you observe?
- What would happen if you used triangles instead of squares on the bottom?
- What makes these two pieces fit together?
- How do you know the colors match?
- How can you fit more ducks inside of the tub?
- What will you do first/next/last?
- Why do you think the orange has segments?
- How can you extend the train track to reach the station?
- What do you have to do to make the road wide enough for the truck to fit?

## PROMPTS AND COMMANDS

Sometimes open-ended inquiry takes the form of soft prompts and soft commands that invite children to share and explain.

- *Talk to me about what you saw.*
- *Describe how you worked together.*
- *Share with us what happened.*
- *Explain how you came up with the idea.*
- *Tell me about how you made your structure.*
- *I'd like to hear what you liked about doing this.*

## PRETEND PROMPTS

Pretend prompts help build a sense of community. When asked to pretend an event is happening or pretend to take action, children become focused on one task together like a group of actors.

- *Pretend you are all on a spaceship. How would you move if you stepped out into space?*
- *Imagine you owned a restaurant. How would you make sure everyone got served the food they liked?*
- *If you were superheroes or heroines, how would you fix this problem together?*
- *If you could build a robot together out of these boxes, what tasks would it be able to do?*

***“Critical thinking involves children in the learning process by allowing them to probe and question while encouraging them to analyze and process the information through reflection and evaluation.”  
(Dewey [1910] 2008).***



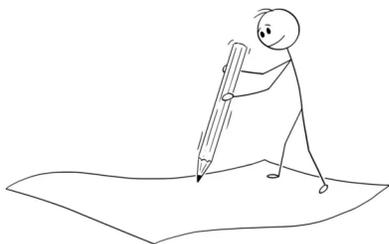
## ENCOURAGEMENT VS. PRAISE

There is a distinct difference between praise and encouragement. Children who are praised tend to look for more opportunities to please someone other than themselves. They aren't making decisions because they want to, but because you want them to. Here are some examples of positive support and encouragement:

- *Action: both arms straight up in the air like a cheer*
- *Action: two thumbs up*
- *Action: high five with child*
- *You remembered!*
- *That's the way to use your mind.*
- *You have gotten a lot done.*
- *You're almost finished.*
- *I can see you're thinking hard about it.*
- *I can't wait to take a picture.*
- *Look what you can do all by yourself.*
- *I see how you improved your design.*
- *You work very well together.*
- *I noticed the way you helped each other.*

## DRDP MEASURES

Consider referring to the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) measures when formulating questions while observing children in typical environments, activities, and routines. The DRDP assesses a child's developmental progress by measuring knowledge, skills, and behaviors.



It's important to ask open-ended questions that encourage children to express themselves and demonstrate their skills. Adapt the questions based on the specific domains you are assessing within the DRDP and the individual child's age and developmental level. Questions and mastery may cross over into several different measures. Here are some open-ended questions you can consider:

### **Social and Emotional Development**

- *How do you feel when you come to school?*
- *How do you treat a baby?*
- *How can you work together to fix it?*
- *Why did you choose the pink scarf for your friend?*
- *How did you decide on which roles you would play?*

### **Language and Literacy Development**

- *What would you do if you were the rabbit in the story?*
- *How did you know where to find the markers?*
- *How do you think the eggs got to be green?*
- *Tell me about your weekend visit to the zoo.*

### **Cognition, Including Math and Science**

- *How did you get the kite to fly?*
- *How can you sort/place these to make them easy to find/count?*
- *How do you know these are longer than those?*
- *What do you notice about the inside of the apple?*

## **EXPANDING ON CHANTS, LULLABIES, AND NURSERY RHYMES**

**Song:** *Pat-a-Cake*

***Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake baker's man.  
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.  
Roll it and pat it and mark it with a "B."  
And put it in the oven for baby and me.***



### **Suggested open-ended inquiry:**

- *Show me how you would pat a cake.*
- *Why do you think the baker is baking a cake?*
- *Why is the baker being asked to bake the cake fast?*
- *How do you make/bake a cake?*
- *Why do you think the cake will be marked with a "B?"*
- *What letter would you put on the cake? Why?*
- *How would you decorate the cake?*
- *How do you think the cake will taste?*

Angela Russ-Ayon is the author of *The BIG Book of Open-Ended Questions to Intentionally Support Young Children in Learning*

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and welcome to the CLUB!***

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