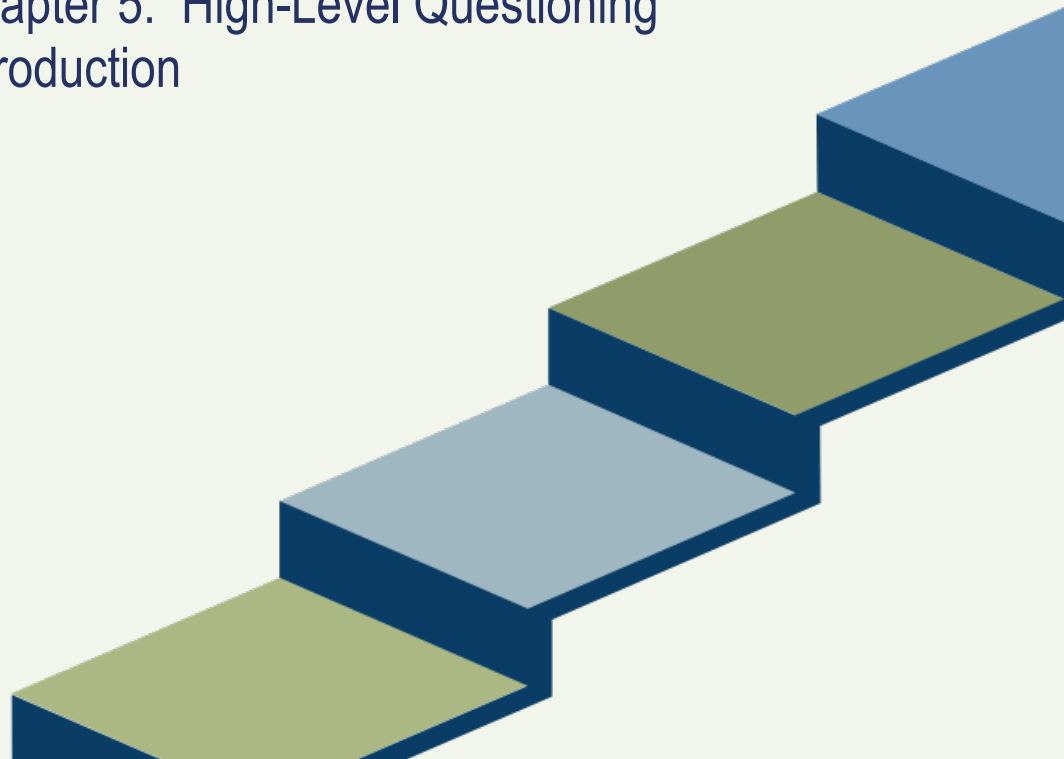


Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 5: High-Level Questioning
Introduction



Chapter 5

High-Level Questioning

Once teachers elevate the rigor of a task, they may also want to examine the questions that accompany that task. Focusing on the task and questions separately can help teachers identify more clearly where students need support.

Generally speaking, there are two types of questions: open and closed. Closed questions have a clear answer and ask students to recall basic facts (e.g. What is the capital of Jamaica?). Open questions, on the other hand, invite a wider variety of responses (e.g. What did you think of today's activity? How would you address this problem?). They also lead to deeper levels of thinking.

To get the most out of the questions they ask, teachers should plan questions ahead of time and connect them to the objectives of the lesson. Ensure that the majority of questions asked are open-ended; use closed questions less frequently to check for understanding and recall. Rigorous questions should be scaffolded to help increase levels of thinking and supported by lower-order questions as needed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students should be encouraged to ask their own questions.

Of course, it takes time to develop rigorous questions, and teachers may find that—even with the best intentions—students still struggle to answer them. In response, teachers might pull back and either give students the answer because the wait time is uncomfortable, or because they really want to be helpful. But if teachers wish to encourage perseverance and deeper thinking, they should reflect on the purpose and design of their questions so they can keep working toward higher-levels of rigor.

Much of the current research confirms that “higher-level questions...develop students’ higher-order thinking skills,” such as problem-solving, evaluation, and analysis (Lombardi, 2017, para. 59). When teachers ask questions that encourage students to explain, clarify, or infer (rather than simply recall information), students will often demonstrate greater engagement and interest in the content because they’re being challenged to think in new ways.

To foster greater equity when designing high-level questions, teachers can pose the rigorous questions and then pair students up with their peers. Students who may be struggling then get to hear the thinking of other students at higher levels that they may not have access to otherwise. This kind of peer modeling offers additional support to ensure all students can answer high-level questions.